

THE ARGUMENT

with reference to the Quran

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Humanity Let Down by the Gatekeepers of the Knowledge

The nature of human intelligence is a subject which has fascinated me for many years. Early in my life I began to explore questions of epistemology. What is knowledge? What is the nature of the intellect? How can I acquire true knowledge? Who should I regard as intelligent? Who can I take as an authority?

My search has led me to explore the history of human thought from Socrates (Ancient Greek philosopher) to Bertrand Russell (twentieth century British philosopher), to the complex and intricate ideas of the post modern era. I have been left with a sense that all these thinkers have relied on artifice and fabrication, promoting partial and subjective viewpoints, which did not grapple with the core issues of human existence. They succeeded in diverting people away from the fundamental priorities of humanity. Not having attained the full potential of the human mind, these 'thinkers' collectively exploited the suggestive nature of ordinary people and established a hierarchy of secondary priorities. Through mutual praise and admiration of each other they ensured that limited models of thought were regarded as the mark of human progress.

Intelligence is the ability to identify appropriate priorities. All these thinkers failed to focus on the fundamental human priorities that would ensure the future of all Humanity, enabling it to realise its full potential. Let us take a simple comparison. Prehistoric Man was illiterate and unsophisticated, with few means of survival. His existence was threatened from all sides. In these early stages of human life, the cave dweller who first perceived these dangers to human existence and made them his priority was a genius of his time. Possessing the most basic resources, this 'uneducated' and 'unintelligent' human being made an accurate assessment of his priorities, ensuring that mankind and the 'gift of life' was passed on to future generations. The tree of life, its consciousness dripping in blood, had to endure unimaginable loss and suffering to survive. Our human ancestors endeavoured to leave each succeeding generation in a safe environment. The safeguarding of life, the gift of speech and communication, the use of experience and experimentation, living in social communities: these are some of the greatest treasures which early Man passed on to future generations.

Millennia later we witness the devastating effects of the achievements of the educated and all-wise gatekeepers of human life, who belong to the most 'advanced' and 'civilized' societies known to Man. Knowledge, technology and status have become the tools for exploiting and devaluing people. The duty of safeguarding life has been replaced with the impulse for destruction. On what basis can contemporary, sophisticated society claim superiority over the 'uncivilised', backward and simple ancestors of the human race? Prehistoric Man fought and struggled against the grip of his reptilian instincts, trying to collect every grain and drop of wisdom to guide him. Yet modern Man, blinded by his arts and sciences and proud of his inventions and discoveries, is striving to strengthen and spread the self-destructive instincts that early Man was trying to subjugate.

The responsibility for this lies with the long list of scholars and thinkers who deliberately deceived the human race. Diverting people from the basic priorities, they lured them towards glittering, inconsequential theories. Philosophers, sages, politicians and military commanders became the victims of personal pride, driven by the desire for status and

glory. Was this an expression of dislike for the ethical teachings of the Prophets? Who is the more intelligent, those who invite mankind to address their fundamental priorities, or those intellectual hypocrites who have entangled humanity in the complexities of tertiary priorities? The issue is not about religion - whether it is true or even necessary. It is about a basic question that has plagued humanity: what is the purpose of human existence? Why have Plato and Socrates not solved this basic question? Why did Fichte and Nietzsche not provide a solution to it? Why did the investigations of Wittgenstein and Russell not focus on this most natural of questions?

The answer is simple – they did not possess integrating, holistic intellects. Their minds were not developed to a degree that would enable them to identify the priorities of life linked to the purpose of human existence. They possessed inferior and limited thinking which could not go beyond the intellectual confines of society. That is why they focused on mundane matters. The driving force behind their intellectual pursuits was not to discover the truth, but the desire to attain status and glory. They worshipped the splendour of their own intelligence. Consider the cosmologist who investigates the origins of the universe but completely overlooks the fundamental question of human purpose. Even Einstein in his preoccupation with the theory of Relativity ignores the fundamental point of human purpose on Earth.

I have been unable to find an explanation for the total self-disregard shown by these individuals, irrespective of time and place, in dealing with the basic question of purpose. With regret, I have arrived at the conclusion that these big names of human thought appear to be entangled in the spider's web of intellectual deception. They colluded with each other to deceive the entire human race. Perhaps, these self-deceived individuals insisted on limiting the intellectual capacity of mankind in order to prevent them from using their intellects in an objective manner. Had their followers used their intellect objectively the limited intelligence of these thinkers would have been exposed. Instead, this long line of shallow-minded, unintelligent 'thinkers' glorified fundamental human flaws by portraying them as the product of intellect and insight. They led their fellow

humans to the point where they do not know who they are, or their true identity as human beings, living aimless, meaningless lives with no destination, and a non-existent future.

The analysis I have presented above has been motivated by the desire to understand the human condition in an impartial manner. By natural disposition I am not a sceptical or a confrontational person. Nor has it been my habit to be envious of the achievements of others. Every step of human progress awakens within me a shared feeling of human greatness. However, the question that has troubled me since my youth is not specific to me. It is impossible for anyone to live a purposeful life without finding an answer to this question: what is the point of an exam in which your answers are not related to the questions?

The Cycles of History

Modern Man has made technological progress. This is undeniable and equally unremarkable. History shows that other civilisations also made unprecedented advances when measured against the standards of their time. They all went through the cycle of rise, decline and destruction. If what they achieved was truly progress and greatness why, then, did they disappear into nothingness? These were not random events, since history follows a pattern that continuously repeats itself. The task of humankind is to study the cycles of history in order to avoid getting caught in the snares that earlier nations became trapped in. The fact that they are able to keep alive the lessons of the past and learn from their mistakes is what gives human beings superiority over Angels. We are able to use this capacity to better our present situation and leave signposts for the future. Despite this, as a species we have developed collective amnesia with regards to learning lessons from history.

History is also the disastrous lesson which has never been able to guide tyrants and despots. Every dictator ignores the lesson of history and portrays himself as the maker of history. He does not seek guidance from events of the past. If he did, he would notice that time and again the worship of God is cast aside in favour of devotion to idols and heroes. This is the first step towards destruction. How many conquerors fell into the same trap as those before them? The philosophers of Greece and the democracy of Athens were wiped from existence. Even Cicero and Plutarch could not save the gods of Rome. History has failed in restraining the negative aspects of Man that ultimately lead to his downfall. Yet it is full of interest and contains within it the social, economic and religious values of ancient and medieval times. History is never completely faithful to actual events as it is told through the mouths of critics and opinion makers who come later. But those who will heed the lessons of history are rare to find. Fighting in the thick of the battle and talking about the battle from a comfortable chair in a lecture hall are two different things.

Fossils allow us to establish the chronology of human life and history keeps alive the past achievements of individuals and nations like a blazing star, visible from a distance through the pitch darkness of the past. The distance between the Earth and space seems insignificant, perhaps, because of the numerous stars that shine in the night. Sometimes the recall of a single word or a phrase brings back to life the forgotten lessons of the past. The sense of distance diminishes like each passing milestone. But history is no longer the story of facts. We are keen to give our opinions and totally ignore the lessons of history. The madness of today seems like an embodiment of the mistakes of the past. Before their final demise, few display signs of remorse or regret. Decline is the philosophy that underpins existence. Where are the Kings and Emperors of the past? To many intellectuals, both Hussain and Yazid were victims. There are even some critics of the Holy Prophets who see these blazing Suns of the human Galaxy as dictators who lusted after power!

Is this the best their highly developed intelligence can come up with? How can such historians express opinions on history, when humanity has not yet been able to figure out the reasons for the study of history? Is it to have wonderful exhibitions of ancient artefacts in museums? Taking lessons from history is seen as a sign of being old fashioned. Buddha did not mention the name of God out of fear that the name he used would only end up as an extra stone idol in the temple of Brahman. But Ashok , who should have learnt the lesson of history, made Buddha into a stone instead. In places of learning, the teachings of Buddha were replaced with the tradition of rehearsing in detail the works of the enslaved makers of Buddha's statues.

History demonstrates that not a single nation perished under the cloud of poverty. Is it not strange that past nations suffered from unforeseen tragedies only when they were at the height of their progress, glory and quality of life? History has sorted out the facts. But history does not record the fact that a particular nation was destroyed because of their excesses and rebellion against God and human nature. No historian has explained that the earlier and later nations of Aad were destroyed because of their inhumane and corrupt practices. Even if this had been written down the civilised nations of today would not have regarded it as worthy of any attention. Have they not given legal protection to explicitly immoral practices? The superficial rationalists have paved the way for the perversion of the natural instincts of Man.

Future historians will record that modern Man did not steer clear from the gross and foolish practices in history and failed to discover the foundations of a better society. History shows that the human race has never agreed with each other. It has never united, and harmony of values has never occurred. The sons and daughters of Adam and Eve did not use reason. They divided the earth and parcelled out the sky. They shared out bodies, and distributed blood. They fought wars for power and control. They made claims of sovereignty over time and space. With speed they tried to rush towards their ultimate outcome, and this outcome is no different from that of previous nations. I belong to this age and can say without hesitation that history shows that sooner or later humanity will

find itself on the verge of annihilation, in proportion to Noah's flood or the final Day of Judgment. The whole of history is a testament that all the visible evidence is pointing in this direction. This is not a prophecy. It is a historical fact and only a few moments of time remain between now and the final outcome. This is also not despair. It is the same reality that turns away from the concept of miracles. Is it not mythical make-believe to imagine that this time history will not repeat itself? What miracle are you waiting for and whom do you expect this miracle from? Those who seek guidance from Maths, Physics and Geometry cannot accept reality. Think of how many scientific facts have become old fictions, and how many modern scientific concepts have become the subject of speculation, and the number of 'settled' scientific conclusions that have had to be re-evaluated.

History is also a science which has unceasingly repeated its conclusions in time and space, and continues to do so. There is no change in its practice. The same events always lead to the same outcomes. Do you not observe in history the law that if all the conditions and relationships stay the same as they were, then the outcome will be exactly the same as it was before? Is it not clear who is backward and against progress? If the use of reason is the way forward, then the reptilian instinct prefers to go backwards in time when humans were indistinguishable from animals. But is the conduct of backwardness displayed through things or values? Travelling to and from work by car, bus or train cannot be regarded as opposing development. Is reverting to ancient values what is meant by 'regressive'? Nobody these days will travel a hundred miles on a donkey instead of a bus. So in the realm of physical facts and objects nobody is against advancement. Maybe the revival of old prejudices is backwardness. Some return to the concept of God, and others turn back to the norms of Sparta and Lesbos (Greek city states). The regression of the East to the time of the Prophet is not too distant in time. But the relapse of the West is to the lifestyles of Aad and Thamud, which is even more backward!

The Primates have clearly begun to take a step towards curiosity and thought. But we, the humans of the present age, want to go back to the age of Zeus . The men want to

become Satyrs , Greek Deities of the mountains and woods who spent their time drinking, dancing and partaking in sexual pleasures, and the females aspire to become Nymphs , paragons of feminine beauty. It is astonishing that appliances are the mark of progress, machines dependant on a flick of your finger before they can bring themselves into motion! If instruments alone are progress then there is much truth in what Abraham said. The biggest idol must be the one which annihilates the smaller ones.

What is the ultimate goal that Man can single out in the name of freedom? What does he want? The consequences of some of these personal freedoms are apparent in several societies. But other societies have restrained themselves from these freedoms, perhaps because they are 'backward'. When you think about it, if it were not for this old fashioned self-control then the ultimate notion of freedom to indulge in reptilian instincts would be the death knell of mankind. The Pagan gods Laat, Habal and Manaat are still present today. Circling the Kaaba while naked is Jahiliyya (ignorance). But how can cultural nudity and striptease be thought of as universal virtues? Today we do not find the statue of Habal , but the Statue of Liberty. We seek 'Liberation' from our real nature and our creator. The historical form may have changed but the values are the same.

However, reality does not change. The constellation of stars appears the same as they did then, even though our instruments of observation have changed. People ridiculed the message of the Prophets by creating stereotypes. This is true today and many such clichés have become part of modern discourse. They are part of satirical speech. It is said that they break the power of dogma. Thus you are outdated, uncivilised and backward, not fit to be part of the modern age. You are a follower of a pointless religion. You are the victim of low intellectual capacity and are not yet fully refined. Your outward hijab is in reality veiling your intellect. If you were to leave your top button undone then you would feel a fresh breeze. If your eyes are not made up and the locks of your hair are not visible then you will be laughed at. Your language should show your status. Crows and imitations should always follow the lead of the swan. Your speech is balanced and courteous, but such a speech does not possess international prestige. Real conversation

should be peppered with broken phrases of foreign tongues and monkey-like gestures. This is a sign of progress and civilisation!

You can be a 'nice' person, but not a modern one. The clear sparkling waters of a river end up mingling with the rough, murky and hideous waters of the sea. Modernity is like an ocean. Wave after wave, from its deep, dark depths up to its surface, are a perpetual spread of darkness. Not even the clouds of kindness and generosity with their crystal pure, distilled and life-giving rain can purify its waters. For thousands of years the efforts of the Prophets could not turn the direction of the decaying and decomposing mentality of Man. The standard of fairness of modern Man is such that even the benchmark of justice of primates such as Capuchin Monkeys is far superior to that of Bush and Blair.

Self Delusion

Not having knowledge is one thing, but formal education alone leads to delusions of grandeur. The mind at the threshold of discovery is tossed by waves of creativity and begins to fantasise about its superiority. It believes that its intellectual state is unique and therefore is deserving of recognition and praise. The lifestyle of such an individual changes to reflect the avant-garde style of his thinking. As a species it seems that we cannot cope with the thrill of our discoveries and insights. Once ordinary people, we become obsessed with establishing the uniqueness of our ideas.

We regard every thought as uniquely ours, even though we are aware that, just like all other things, ideas are interconnected. They do not exist in a vacuum and are at the centre of a web of thoughts. They have 'ancestors and descendants'. It is possible to find out about the 'relatives and family' of a thought as soon as it is uttered. In other words, every thought builds on the intellectual inheritance of previous generations and the scholarly activity of contemporaries. It does not arise out of nothingness. The fantasies of

the intellectual prevent him from acknowledging this. He finds it difficult to survive the test of imagination, as there are no limits to the personal glory the mind's eye can envisage. Nobody can survive this trial and remain sane without the love and fear of God.

The realms of thought, feelings and emotions are more intricate than the branches of science which study visible phenomena. We lay down our defences when we are caught up in the trenches of the soul. Ideas have the ability to carve a place in our minds without any resistance. This is irrespective of the nature and type of thought; whether it is of greatness or inferiority, love or hatred, boldness of desire or the swelling of passion. The mind does not exercise discretion in selecting the thoughts it entertains. Having knowledge, then, is a kind of drunkenness we rush head over heels to experience. We regard it as a sign of high status - something we take pride in. For instance, when a man of letters produces a sentence of unsurpassed beauty which evokes an intense emotion, he finds himself indulging in the sweet deception of self-satisfaction. This leads him to believe that he is unique and his mind swells with feelings of greatness.

Our fascination with our own ideas disconnects us from reality. We see moderation as an ordinary response and reject it in favour of outrageousness. Poets, novelists and artists regard the golden mean as an unworthy maxim. This encourages these individuals to deviate from the natural balanced way of life in favour of practices which gain them publicity but which cause immense damage to the fabric of society. Ordinary people who are swayed by the media tend to follow suit and start imitating these celebrities, whom they regard as idols. This drunken madness tramples over all ethical principles including those which ensured the survival of the human race from the time that mankind lived in caves till the urbanisation of modern times. We are on the brink of social collapse. Anarchy is the result of ill informed and scattered ideas. It is the rejection of fundamental priorities and an attempt to force society to conform to individual tastes. Freedom of expression is being exploited by those wanting to transform society into anarchy governed by basic animal instincts. It is only the ethical ideals and awareness of a Prophet which

are immune from its effects. The mind of a Prophet is a repository of the highest intellect of the age.

It is the Prophet who comprehends the effects of the reptilian Self on the individual and society. He understands how it may lead some people to distort the meanings of divine scripture for their own ends. In particular those who aspire to greatness use their powerful intellects to create a hall of mirrors. This results in the complete perversion of human thought, a matrix from which very few escape. In some ways this explains the fact that to this day the human intellect has failed to provide a system of ethics and morality which safeguards the interests of all nations and communities. These intellectuals succeed in undermining the framework of ethics by spreading the virus of immorality in the name of freedom and celebrity. Some of the most despicable acts of deviancy have been institutionalised.

There is nothing wrong with the desire to become cultured. But when you reflect on the concepts being promoted today in the name of culture, you are struck by their backwardness. Humanity has struggled for centuries to develop control over the reptilian Self, yet we are being invited to take a retrograde step and revert back to the moral framework of cave dwellers. Nations who succumbed to this level perished. The thinkers and philosophers of today are the intellectual inheritors of the failed and devastated nations whose archaeological ruins are scattered all over the world. These people long for eternity and for their names to live on forever. When one ponders on the ruins of Babylon, the destruction of Pompeii, the archaeological remains of Mohenjo Daro and Harpa, one asks if the intellectuals and men of letters do not live on. Surely, these societies had such figures in their midst. Is it not ironical that the parchment of a poet, the words of a wordsmith or the name or wisdom of a philosopher did not come to light in the dark cities, the devastated homes, the abandoned dwellings and the dried up wells. Although that was the past, modern Man is not much different. Instead of taking heed from the destruction of these nations he takes their archaeological remains as artefacts to adorn his home or museum.

The ridiculing of the inheritors of sound and balanced reasoning, that is the Prophets, is not a new phenomenon: every Prophet suffered from derision and revilement, deceit and deception. Some were put to the sword by the ignorance of the worldly scholars, while attempts were made to take the life of others. However, the interesting thing is that except for the time of the Prophet Yahya when self-purification and perseverance were revered, society as a whole has always given priority in their cultural life to immoral and lewd actions. The mind of Man was diverted from finding a solution to the question of human happiness. The intellect has not eased Man's existential concerns or given him any real benefit in life apart from traffic laws!

The mind intoxicated itself and deprived humanity from achieving success and salvation by utilising the only tool at its disposal, that is, the intellect. It caused more damage by providing the blueprint for an impetuous, visionless and unashamed society. Driven by the stirrings of its animal instincts, it stripped human society of its past, of its sleep, of its peace and security, its satisfaction and tranquillity. Intellectual movements diverted mankind from its foremost priority. It seems that the entire human race is in a state of drunkenness and has forgotten its destination towards which they are headed.

Like inevitable fate, all sorts of ill-considered ideas have come to dominate the minds of men who inhabit a universe of facts and figures, blind to the purpose of human existence. This is a catastrophe which has come about because people are imposing the intellectual leadership of these ideas on themselves. There is no room for God in this paradigm. He is the spectre that continues to haunt the intellect of the present age. No matter how hard he tries, Man shudders in terror and dread when he contemplates his end. If death was the end of our existence and there was nothing after that, no life, no accountability, no punishment, then we would be truly free to do what we like. No living creature can escape the shadow of death. The demon of the intoxicated intellect is slowly pushing Man over the edge into the ocean of despair and regret. From time to time a flash of lightening illuminates the way for the seafarer, travelling in a wrecked vessel about to sink, and he perceives the light of religion, but then the light vanishes and he is once

again surrounded by the same terrifying ocean, the same intense darkness, and the same horrifying waves.

Is Personal Freedom Absolute?

This short life, beginning with birth and culminating in death can be divided into periods. We are all bound by the human life cycle. Those who regard themselves as different and unique are also governed by the phases of the same life cycle. From the temporal to the spiritual, everyone and everything falls within this spectrum. For instance, the pleasures of the flesh and the delights of the mind may seem totally apart but in essence are similar. Even positive and negative responses may seem different but in the final analysis both are the same.

The most widespread division of the stages of life is the Hindu Asharma system, which divides life into four phases. The first twenty-five years is called the Brahmacharya Ashram, the stage of youth. The second twenty-five years, is called the Grihastha Ashram or householder phase during which one focuses on family and work. The third section is the Vanaprastha or the hermitage phase where one gradually withdraws from others for contemplation. The fourth and final is the Sannyasa or renunciation phase in which one withdraws completely from the world and dedicates himself to the pursuit of spiritual truths.

This view of the stages of life has influenced almost every society in the world. The outcome of this is that we allocate the last period of our lives to focus on the fundamental and ultimate reality of existence, a stage of life which cannot be guaranteed that we will reach. How can someone who sets aside the final years of his life (when his sensory faculties become weak and his mental faculties debilitated) to solve the ultimate priority of life claim that he is intelligent? Is it not incumbent on the human race to find out how and in which capacity they should live their lives? Instead of focusing on this core question, contemporary thought has become self-absorbed. In this expansive universe we

notice only ourselves. We claim that there is no firm evidence pointing to a power greater than Man, a force that could have brought this cosmos into being. We alone matter: everything else is irrelevant!

Our knowledge of the universe is extremely limited and rudimentary. Leaving aside the entire cosmos, we have not even mastered the understanding of phenomena which exist upon Earth and within its atmosphere. But this does not stop us from acting as though we are the inheritors of the universe. Without observing reality in an objective manner, the blind intellectuals of secularism refuse to accept the possibility of a reality lying beyond physical matter, or hints of life beyond the grave. This denial is based on the fact we cannot observe such a reality, therefore it does not exist. However, is it the case that thoughts, ideas and imaginations are all based on visible evidence? If it were so, the novelist would not be able to produce a new line of literature, nor could the poet create flights of fancy. The scientist studies the relationships between things. He is totally unaware of the reality of things. Clutching a few facts and figures, like Shylock, Man writes off all metaphysical facts as presumptions. Despite this, he is compelled to accept the noblest qualities of Man, his creative capacities and intellectual ideals, but declares that they have no basis in reality. Secular Man has developed an intellectual contempt for all non-physical reality and suffers from a schizophrenic disorder that convinces him of his own greatness. He wants to be the final authority on deciding on matters of life and how it should be lived.

However, the credentials of the secular scientific community in fulfilling this role are open to question. There are many whose intellectual standard is below average. Their approach to a range of issues pertinent to life is dismissive, ignores the facts and is at times absurd. No scientist has to this day answered the fundamental question relating to human life: do we possess absolute freedom or are we subject to a higher authority? Consider for yourself, is this not an investigation of vital importance, with major implications for the human race. It is a question of human freedom or servitude. Do we control our entry and exit into life or are these governed by some force external to us?

Assuming for a moment that we have absolute personal freedom, does this entitle us to impose our tastes and ethical outlook on others? If this were the case then life in general would be driven by the basic reptilian instinct of self-obsession. Each person ruthlessly protecting their own interests, imposing their ideas on others regardless of any higher values. The strong would dominate the weak, resulting in a state of tyranny and perpetual strife. Should this assumption not be scrutinised? Are we really free to do whatever we like or are we answerable to some higher force who has blessed us with all of our faculties? It is the moral and intellectual duty of all human beings to answer this basic question in the early part of their life so that they are able to fulfil the responsibilities which come with being human.

The greatest obstacle in considering this question is the concept of God, as it will determine whether we are absolutely free or have obligations to someone greater than Man. If God exists then we are not free.

We have not shown much interest in finding out about the greatest adversary whose potential existence threatens our freedom, the force which claims to have created the Earth and the skies, a Being which, from the genesis of time through to eternity, is upholding and overseeing the order of the Earth, its physical and natural resources, its population, the rise and fall of its inhabitants, and the consequences of war and disputes between them. This invisible intelligence has set up the systems we take for granted; the changing seasons, ethnic and family groupings, children and offspring. It regulates our livelihoods and commercial success, determines our health and sickness, our sadness and joy.

It declares that the devastating gale force winds, the gentle morning breeze, the dazzling dew drops caressing the cheeks of the tulip and the rose, the dry and dying bright yellow leaves of autumn, the snow-capped peaks of distant mountains, the mighty clouds bursting with rain, the deep and mysterious oceans, the still and silent mountains, and the merciless cycle of life and death, all these are just a few glimmers of its influence and

control over the universe. In the presence of such a force how can we ever be free? Are we not helpless in front of it? Our power, our arguments, our efforts, our hopes, our knowledge and intelligence, our science or any other human quality or achievement cannot interfere with its control over us.

Has any philosopher, scientist or self appointed spokesman for mankind ever made an attempt to answer the fundamental question at the heart of human self-awareness? Is there anyone who has dedicated their life to the pursuit of God and concluded their research with the declaration “Mankind you are totally free for I have objectively established that God does not exist”.

In matters of religion, scientists were mean and frivolous. They were blinded by a very basic caricature of religion and everything associated with it. For instance, they failed to distinguish between the timeless truths of religion and the corrupt gatekeepers of faith who exploited the name of God for their own ends. They cast aside their high standards of objectivity and did not apply these to the realities claimed by religion. It is not uncommon for a scientist to dedicate his entire life researching a single phenomenon, spending twenty to fifty years in the pursuit of one equation. The pharmacologist Alexander Fleming occupied years of his life looking at dishes of bacteria which led to the discovery of Penicillin; and after years of mental and mathematical training Isaac Newton was able to formulate the Law of Gravity. We find one scientist spending his entire life engrossed in the motion of heavenly bodies and another obsessed by the search for a fungus which will save lives.

However, when intellectuals and popularisers of science, such as Bertrand Russell (1872-1970) and Carl Sagan (1934-1996) turned to religion they displayed a strange, irrational and reactionary approach to the study of religion. In scientific matters they maintained their integrity and objective approach, but were conspicuously biased when it came to religion. If they were around today one could ask: if the study of a simple phenomenon of nature requires the dedication of a whole lifetime, then is it right that the study of the

All-knowing and All-Wise intelligence and force behind the Cosmos should be left to casual comments, unsupported by research, and an intellectual approach more characteristic of children than sincere scientists? It is even more astonishing that when scientists approach the study of natural phenomena they are strictly opposed to undertaking research clouded by personal feelings, hidden assumptions and subjective reasoning. These things are so abhorrent that any scientist who allows personal biases to influence their research becomes the target of criticism and ridicule. Yet the speed and foolishness of their knee-jerk response to metaphysical realities is beyond belief.

Leaving aside the giants of science, there are mediocre professors who oppose religion solely on the grounds of personal choice and freedom of expression. They fear that an objective study of religion might destroy the imaginary demon of religion they have created and placed in front of the people; a monster which feeds on basic human fears, instincts and ethnic differences. To maintain this myth they deliberately present religion as irrational. However, they are keen to preserve religion as a symbolic totem which will permit them in times of need to visit a shrine, to supplicate at the door of a holy man, or to fall at the feet of a religious healer. How could anyone follow such a religion or worship a God who is dumbfounded and confused by a handful of facts based on empirical research?

Is God still stuck in the past? Has He not been able to advance His understanding? It seems that modern science has shattered the foundations of hypothetical faith and left it in a quandary in the desert of scepticism. The Devil (Shaytaan) is no fool; his strategy is to portray God as undesirable and pathetic. Is it not strange for a God, who does not have a limited understanding of the basic branches of science, to claim that He is the originator of all creation? A God, still living in a bygone era dependent on outmoded means, who trembles in awe at modern Man's intellectual and technological advances. Like Gulliver, He has been brought down and pinned to the ground by the tiny Lilliputians. The Emblem of power and majesty, possessing absolute wisdom has lost His nerve in the face of a few scientific facts and is content to accept that His existence is only

a supposition which has no basis in reality. This is precisely the view of God held by secular scientists. What else do you expect from this kind of intellect? The distinction between what is conceptual and what is real is of huge importance to scientists. It is also the biggest stumbling block in their approach to God. The assumption that God does not exist distorts their research. Of course they will acknowledge the concept of God but will never accept even the remotest possibility that He could really exist. Why is this the case? Has there never been anyone who has specialized in the reality of God; or dedicated their entire life in the pursuit of God? Did the desire to fathom the reality of the cosmos not take hold of any human being? Has the intellectual garden of the human mind never witnessed the blossoming of a divine flower rooted in objective research and enquiry? Has the concept of God always been bereft of intelligence and reason? Have those who claim to be certain of God's existence relied purely on blind emotion and feeling? Perhaps religion was only destined to last for a specified time in human history, and when the sun of reason reached its zenith, the only way for religion to survive was for it to suspend itself upside down, like a totally blind bat, and withdraw.

The idea that Divine knowledge should not be delved into, for the fear that it might prove to be primitive in the light of modern science, is ludicrous. There are many scientifically minded individuals who are adamant that we must not search for scientific ideas and inspiration in the book of God (Quran). What would these people do if God did decide to reveal scientific realities in His divine revelation? Perhaps they have forgotten that although a revealed book is not a book of science it is definitely a book of creation. It is impossible to imagine that such a book will not contain the laws and principles relating to the origin of the universe, the mystery of life, the end of the cosmos, and causal effects and outcomes. If you feel that it is your duty to investigate then, do so. Remember that a human can make a thousand mistakes and still retain his status as a human being, but if God makes a single mistake He can never keep the title of God. Here we have God claiming that the Quran is His data. This is a brilliant opportunity for mankind to set up an objective test to prove or disprove God. The myth of God could be

buried forever if we are able to find one single flaw in His data. Surely we can find a tiny flaw in the book of God!

This is an open challenge to mankind from God. All we have to do is to undertake a detailed study of the Quran in the same objective and diligent manner as we would a piece of scientific research. We can then declare with credibility that God's understanding of basic scientific facts is flawed and that His knowledge of the cosmos is limited. We could conclude that God is merely a storyteller who accompanies the desert caravans to relieve the boredom of the weary travellers by transporting their imaginations into the realms of supernatural fantasy. You may notice that I have specifically referred to the Quran when inviting you to challenge God. This is because it is the most perfectly preserved religious scripture and it is the only book that God Himself has guaranteed to preserve. He has given a personal guarantee that each phrase and sentence and every fact within it is His direct speech. All one needs to do is to pinpoint one error and that is the end of God! How simple it is to cure this phantom that has haunted mankind for centuries!

However, the intellectuals who undertake the critique of the Quran must demonstrate that they possess the capacity to conduct such an enquiry in accordance with the highest standards of scientific research. They cannot sit in a comfortable armchair and declare their conclusions. The issue at stake is far too important. This research and investigation will be long and arduous. It is not like the approach of the sociologist whose concept of God is of an idea people have made up in order to cope with the harsh realities of life, a concept created in response to the terror and helplessness of their situation. God is escapism!

If such an expert concludes that the mental turmoil experienced by those who believe in God is itself proof that He is merely a supposition, then he must go back and check his research methodology. Our expert is not actually researching God. In fact he has no inclination to find out about God or to understand Him and then give a considered

opinion based on his findings. What he is actually doing is giving an anthropological assessment of how people relate to society's concept of God. This is not the same as researching God. This is probably true for most scholars involved in social research. Their concern is on mundane matters such as how a particular community engages with food and hunting; how settlements grow and the dynamics of family and tribal units; and how myths and beliefs are utilized to maintain tradition and culture. They are not really interested in God, but in the idea of God as it is found in the minds of a particular social unit. As any anthropologist will tell you there is no escape from the concept of God; it keeps raising its head like an uncontrollable weed in prehistoric and later civilizations.

What I find fascinating in the study of sociology and anthropology is that prehistoric Man who did not know how to wash his face or clean his teeth; who had no idea of how to cook meat and food; who had no knowledge of how to build houses and dwellings; who had no concept of having a courtyard or a living room; who was not familiar with the practice of growing vegetables, let alone irrigating land, sowing seeds and harvesting crops; whose physical form evolved from Homo Habilis (earliest Hominid known to use tools) into Homo Erectus; who spent day and night like wild predators swinging from tree tops; and who did not experience any feeling or emotion other than sexual gratification: how strange it is that the first thing that such a creature should do is to start searching for a higher reality (God). The earliest human settlements were religious in character. In fact, all Palaeolithic civilizations were priestly societies with religious rituals and symbolism. The dead were buried with formal rites of passage; prayers said, flowers scattered and offerings made in places as far flung as Mesopotamia and China.

How can one explain this aspect of prehistoric civilization? Did these helpless and unintelligent human beings have access to some alien life form which taught them these metaphysical realities? Perhaps the slightest threat on the human intellect forced it to acknowledge the power of an Almighty God? Could it be possible that human consciousness was gradually being guided by some external agency to adopt practices and ideals which supported human existence and perfection? It is hard to avoid the conclusion

that some external agency or force has been supporting mankind in meeting all their physical, social and spiritual needs. We observe that when our ancestral mother was not yet aware of the nature of her feminine form, she is ‘instinctively’ taught how to sever the umbilical cord of her newborn child. Threatened by wild and predatory animals, our human ancestors are guided to place one brick on top of another and build secure dwellings. Having created systems to satisfy his physical needs we find these same ancestors being directed towards perfecting the art of communication through the use of rhetorical devices and deep understanding of language and grammar. How could all this and more have been independently developed by our uncivilized and prehistoric human ancestors who were driven only by animal passions and the need for survival?

Based on archaeological evidence alone it is difficult to establish that some external agency or force was involved in human progress and development. Such an idea is hard for secular scientists and philosophers to swallow; their minds reach breaking point if they have to accept that the concept of God is as ancient as humanity itself. Their minds are already in mental anguish. The certainties that the scientists have established after painstaking endeavour did not last the course of a century. The certainty of Newton’s universe was shattered by Einstein’s Theory of Relativity. The certainty of Einstein’s universe is in turn being eroded by modern discoveries and research. It seems that uncertainty is intrinsic to the scientific process. In fact, some of the latest discoveries in the field of quantum mechanics have left scientists bewildered. The number of subatomic particles in addition to neutrinos, quarks, muons is growing, not to mention other particles such as the tachyon, which can travel faster than the speed of light. We cannot claim to have mastered the understanding of our galaxy, let alone the cosmos. At every turn we are faced with a reality that we cannot completely fathom: black holes, parallel universes, dark matter, and antimatter. All this suggests an intelligence and power greater than that of Man, yet modern Man insists there is nothing greater than him! We find it difficult to acknowledge the limitations of our intellects and the understanding of life which this generates.

We focus on the here and now and neglect to ponder on the final outcome of the universe; the expansion of the universe is an established fact but its contraction and end is an occurrence which does not seem to concern us much. Our origin was in a specific moment of time in the past but our future has no endpoint. The stakes are high. Are we willing to barter a few decades of life at the expense of eternity? Science has certainly made life more convenient for us, giving us toasters, ovens, cars, trains and planes. It has also made life more dangerous by providing chemical weapons, smart bombs, ballistic missiles and nuclear warheads. However, it has neglected to focus on the fundamental question of the purpose of life. Perhaps science does not have the tools for this. The paradigm established by science to understand reality is as fleeting as the playful dance of the morning breeze on the buds; it then fades away with the dawning of the new day. Time is indeed relative!

By this point you might be forgiven for thinking that I am like a disgruntled teenager who is making mockery of the learning and experience of respected authorities: far from it. I would describe myself as a lost traveller in the desert who finds that all the landmarks and signposts he was given were mirages and guesses. He feels angry and betrayed by his intellectual and knowledgeable superiors, and in this state expresses his frustration in a cultured and respectful manner.

Complacency in the Pursuit of Truth

Complacency is the greatest obstacle in developing our thinking. To believe that your intellectual journey has concluded and you have attained perfection before reaching a decrepit old age is perhaps the greatest error, if not the biggest sin. Thought is a flowing river, by its nature bringing together the 'wet' and the 'dry' and it does not exclude anything, great or small. Rarely can anyone claim to have attained perfection in the path of learning. If this happens, all mental activity ceases and stagnation takes hold of the

mind. When the pure and clear water of a fountain stops flowing, the result is only stench and decay.

Our thinking becomes restricted by goals which drive us. The capacity of the mind quickly reaches its limits because of the boundaries we set for ourselves. We find it very difficult to stretch or go beyond these intellectual confines. To dismiss God based on limited intelligence is unacceptable by any standard of research. Where the human mind reaches its own limits, it erects a temple. The Self continues to worship at the altar of its own intelligence for the rest of its life. Rarely will it see beyond its walls or break out from its confines. Only by objectively pursuing an alternative course of action can the mind escape from its self-imposed boundaries. Curiosity driven by an insatiable appetite to understand reality is the secret for cultivating a healthy vibrant intellect, otherwise the mind becomes like an empty stomach that licks its lining to satiate itself. It does not obtain sustenance from anything else.

The remembrance of God gives life to dead hearts. The life of the mind is nourished by reflecting upon God. The mind of Man is programmed to imagine greatness and perfection. The only being who can satisfy the curiosity of Man is God, the Sublime and Perfect. Of course no human can claim to have acquired absolute wisdom: this is an impossible goal. But the dream of the intellectual is to come as close as possible to something which approximates this. Contemplation of the absolute continues to provide stimulation for the mind. Without God, the intellect succumbs to stagnation and develops a sense of complacency that is the product of self-centredness. It is for this reason that the Quran specifies a limited scope for the human intellect and refers to it as 'lam' . Prolonged inertia kills the mind's capacity to develop further insight and wisdom. Ultimately, every branch of science, with the exception of Mysticism, centres on the physical and practical aspects of life. This is not knowledge, as it doesn't address the deeper issues of human existence. The result is that the experts of worldly sciences are in the end gripped with a sense of dissatisfaction at the meaninglessness of life. The

ultimate cause of this is the stagnation of the intellect which prevents the mind from attaining an insight into the reality of existence.

For centuries Man has lived under the binary tyranny of punishment and reward. Fear of being answerable to an authoritarian God haunts him. Yet the idea of reward from God imprisons him in the realm of actions, stunting his intellectual development. This model of religion does not allow him to develop insight into reality, but encourages him to fulfil the rituals of religion in a robotic fashion. His mind remains disengaged and not satiated. Man's response to this is simple: reject God. This is a knee-jerk reaction to rid himself of the God who threatens him and a religion which does not satisfy him intellectually. The option of denial is the easiest way out. The struggle involved in pursuing the path of thinking and understanding reality is too arduous. Modern Man chose not to verify the truths of religion and God, but threw the baby out with the bath water. The irony is that he finds it difficult to maintain a state of denial of metaphysical realities. The human mind, divorced from God, lacks the capacity to provide a compelling solution to the problems of life and the universe. All such attempts are doomed to failure if they do not understand the nature of human beings and their dependence on the 'Universe' (God). Self-denial can never be a substitute for self-awareness. Many people persist in this denial out of fear of intellectual isolation. If they were to challenge the consensus of denial they would find themselves abandoned and alone. The only way to save yourself from such ignominy is to seek out like-minded people who suffer from similar moral and intellectual crises, and find comfort in people like them.

Who you follow depends on providence. Your desires and attitudes before you commit yourself to the ideas of another, have already determined, whether you want to be a friend of the Rahman (God) or the 'sidekick' of Shaytaan. The vital ingredient of humility is lacking in our leaders. When a scholar eventually realises that he was in the wrong, we find that he lacks the moral courage to openly admit this and save many others from making the same mistakes in thinking. True following is characterized by the accurate assessment of your intellectual capacity, followed by a realization that you lack the

qualities to attain such a level of understanding. This insight leads you to seek the guidance of those who are better qualified and more capable. On the other hand, the corrupt model of following others is when you possess the intellectual capacity but still insist on imprisoning yourself to a narrow school of thought. This form of 'taqleed' (blind following) produces some of the worst types of bigotry and prejudice. It can result in the decline of thinking and understanding that impacts on future generations. It is inconceivable that any ideology will permit the dictates of pure reasoning to penetrate the walls of its intellectual edifice. It is common practice amongst many schools of thought that they attempt to conceal their intellectual shortcomings by resorting to false claims and attributing sacred and divine qualities to themselves. The entire focus shifts to the outward form and imitation of external practice: the conditions of colour and dress become the means of your salvation. This false notion of 'taqleed' does not only hinder understanding, but also does not tolerate even the hint of an alternative viewpoint. These religious and narrow-minded groups continue to instil ideas, which they believe are vitally important, in the minds of their followers. The result of this 'brain washing' is that many simple and respectable people are transformed into insane and fanatical bigots.

This indoctrination of the masses is motivated to some extent by the desire of shallow-minded scholars to safeguard their vested interests. Under no circumstances or at any cost will they allow the bartering of the privileged position they occupy. There is only one way to maintain their grip over the minds of ordinary followers and that is by inhibiting their capacity to think. With extreme skill and mastery, this clique creates feelings of fear in the minds of its devotees, and in this way maintains a strong influence over them, very similar to the way Hindu Brahmins maintain their power and authority over their followers. This tradition continues over generations. All schools of thought are limited in their thinking to the ideas of their founders. Everything else is heresy and disbelief (kufr), and the fear of falling into this cursed category weighs heavy on the mind of the follower.

The testimony of faith (Shahada) is no longer for God but for the 'bricks and beliefs' of your school of thought. No religion in the world preaches fanaticism. How could the

eternal message of moderation end up as a cult of extremism? From Adam to Muhammad not a single Prophet of God was intolerant or of shallow understanding. Each challenged exploitation and oppression, and liberated the minds of their people from the shackles of custom and tradition. Not one of them followed the path of extremism. These Messengers of the Absolute Intellect (God) came to give choice to people: the poverty of ignorant practices can never touch the station of Prophet-hood.

As religions strayed from the path of moderation, they were diverted by feeble-minded individuals from an all-embracing gospel and chained to the values of tribal prejudice and personal honour. Each nation believed that it owned religion and all outsiders were personal and religious rivals. The degree of self-interest, prejudice and bigotry which the Jews displayed in matters of religion later infiltrated into Christianity and went on to inflict immense damage to the universal outlook of Islam. The religion of Islam itself began to be associated with the bigotry of its small-minded 'scholars'. The promoters of Islam turned out to be its deadliest enemies. Instead of the Quran, the ideas of these 'scholars of the externals' began to be regarded as the teachings of Islam: the foundations of an intensely distorted approach to religion were laid. Regrettably, this tradition continues to spread its poison. Unlike science, where men of thinking mutually respected each other's contributions and ideas for the sake of advancing knowledge and research, the proselytisers of religion created their own sects and viewed all other schools of thought as enemies. The most sublime message of the entire universe was manipulated by senseless and unprincipled individuals to wage war and incite hatred in order to pave the way for their grip on power and privilege.

While science continued to advance, religion split into cliques justifying their existence by rejecting others. The Jews refused to accept the ministry of both Jesus and Muhammad; Christianity denounced Islam; and the followers of Islam felt the wrath of both. How could anyone find the way to God, or understand His message, without being sucked into this quagmire of bigotry? God was not about to dispatch another Messenger. Nothing was left apart from common sense and 'reason'. This was the only tool, on an individual

level, which enabled people to climb out of this crisis of religions, comprehend reality, and accept the message of a Unified God.

However, some people attempted to solve this religious crisis by ignoring the fundamental question. They flung the issue of the purpose of life behind their backs and restricted the meaning of life to the pursuit of limited worldly benefits. The religious fanatics had made a mistake by dividing religion, but modern intellectuals made an even bigger mistake. They confused religion with those who claimed to be its followers and rejected it, not on its own merits, but on the feeble-minded misconduct of religious bigots. Has the study of any other scientific phenomenon been subject to this baseless approach? Would the personal character or private beliefs of a scientist have any bearing on the validity of a scientific formula or change the equilibrium of Nature's laws? Why then does the reality of religion change because of the erroneous views of some fanatics? Truth requires all phenomena to be researched with integrity and an open mind, including God and religion. Sadly, the true face of religion is unrecognisable and instead of believing and worshipping God, the masses prostrate their foreheads at the altar of idols, concealed in the bosoms of the narrow-minded 'scholars'.

Mysticism and Shariah

An allusion to Tassawuf (Islamic mysticism) in the Indian Subcontinent is necessary as the masses in this land came to know God through the Sufis. Their personalities and conduct led humanity towards the recognition of God. However, the existence of mystical thought in human history was also reflected by teachers like Zeno of Elea (d. 430 BC), Diogenes (d.323 BC), Plotinus (d.270 CE), Dionysius Exiguus (d.544 CE), St Augustine (d.430) and St Aquinas (d. 1274), followed by a long list of Muslim Sufis. Through self-purification and by establishing the most important priority of the human intellect they were able to achieve sincerity, love and awareness of God. They left clear

signposts for those who came after them thus ensuring that the thought of returning to God continued to exist among the masses.

Islam has produced a large number of Sufis in succession. This is because the religion of Islam has a clear concept of God and its path of guidance is brightly illuminated. The concept of God contains no confusion and the role of the messenger is utterly transparent. Whosoever wants to follow the path towards God will not find a scripture better than the Quran, nor a teacher better than Muhammad, the Messenger of God. The complete preservation of the Quran and the numerous and testified reports of the Prophet's conduct have provided us with unambiguous guidance in every aspect of life. In Islam, mysticism is not an exclusive or selective approach; rather it is the common and standard approach. Every effort to acquire sincerity or striving for self-awareness, balance and moderation naturally leads to God.

It is the Quran alone that leads to a universal conception of God. In other religions the personal views and prejudices of people led to a localized notion of God. Each tribe and nation perceived God as their personal inheritance and appropriated God for themselves. They ranked themselves as God's Beloved. Such a pledge from God is not found in His words or in any of His books.

The Quran tells us that the vastness of the cosmos is a minimal expression of His infinite creative force. It informs us that He is infinite and self-sufficient. How could He be the Father, Son or Brother of anyone? It is impossible for His wondrous beauty to be reflected in idols and statues. He, the Infinitely Just, does not decide to reward conduct and character on the basis of how closely related someone is to someone. His providence is not contingent on our acceptance or denial. He provides sustenance both for the believer and the non-believer. In fact, He gives more to the non-believer taking all considerations into account. God, the Sublime and Exalted cannot be comprehended by the human intellect without knowledge and understanding.

Better knowledge leads to better recognition. Because of this the Sufis consider knowledge of God and self-awareness as the ultimate priority. From the hordes of Mullahs and holy men of today not a single one has accomplished even the generic standards of the self-recognition of God. They have failed in this because they are inclined to embroil the general public in mythological stories so that they can conceal their inner vices and depravity. Their sole aim is to seek their personal interests and satisfy their own desires. Nevertheless, there are a conscientious few who have a glimmer of sincerity. However they have not been able to climb out of the matrix of deceptive representation. Their journey continues in darkness. Those who trust the insincere Mullahs are so naive and innocent that not only are they bewitched by this magical system but they have been deceived to such an extent that they have become prisoners to blind following. They do not dare to question their masters.

The paths of the Shariah, the external Law, and Tareeqat, the inner Law, have been hijacked by quacks. Knowledge and reality gave way to absurd fictions and long and useless litanies begun to pile up. The world of forty-day retreats, invocations, mystical powers and spiritual states was created. Control of every street and corner was handed over to the recruits of these schools of magical charms. Now every morsel of daily bread, every matter, every marriage and wedding, every job and career opportunity was not possible without these magical spells. Godhood was handed over to magicians. It seems as if these people have got together and exiled God from the universe. There were only a handful of those who are able to watch over the reputation of their virtuous forefathers.

The vicious contest between the forces of pseudo-Sufi schools and the reprehensible clerics completely erased any distinction between truth and falsehood from the minds of both sides. The reality of the divine vanished in the swarm of litanies and baseless fairy tales. When the Mullahs saw that the Sufi pretenders were more popular and much loved by ordinary people, they began to make their own claims to mysticism in their own groups. They had no understanding of the gradations of mystical thought. In their grand design of greed and gluttony they prepared a mythology of mystical powers which

shocked and surprised the people of real understanding. The minds of the Mullahs set up the most stringent principles of allegiance to themselves (Ba'ayat). In the style of free masonry they straitjacketed their followers into a Madrasah system based on conflicting views which wiped out any independent thought or action. Dazed, bewildered and confused, their followers became trapped into movements similar to those of the Hashshashin (Assassins) of Alamut .

Religion disappeared: only the traditions of extremism, hatred and exploitation were left behind. In addition to the Mullahs there were certain families who exploited the names of the Naqshabandis, Suharwardis, Qadiries and Chishties to drive forward their own interests. These parasitic creatures fastened their tentacles around the necks of the people. The Masters of mysticism had already reached God and all that was left in the hands of these Crows (imposters) were oaths of allegiance, feasting and singing. A simple general fact-finding exercise can reveal this fact. In the contest of worldly power, the descendants of the great mystics rose above every moral constraint. They became captives to the lust for land, gold, status and control. Mullahism, like Catholicism and Judaism, succeeded in creating a system which safeguarded its interests. Sincere and well-meaning leaders were replaced with seminary trained but uneducated fanatics.

Islam and God began to be associated with killing and bloodshed. This gave the secularist another excuse. He found another argument for the superiority of his civilization and the necessity for social freedom. So, with extreme cruelty, secularism began to pursue religion, especially the followers of Islam. Alas, how unfortunate for mankind! Gone is the religion which was the only way to attain the proximity of the ultimate reality and instead we are left with nothing but the stench of personal prejudice. Gone is the religion which is the science of all sciences, leaving behind displays of sheer madness. The intimate knowers of God's mysteries have disappeared and in their place are the assassins of character and morality. Gone are the true mystics such as Bayazid Bistami (d. 874), Junaid al-Baghdadi (d. 910), Rabia al-Adawiya (d. 801) and Hasan Basri (d. 737), and we are left with mere Mullahs, Mullahs and more Mullahs.

These self-intoxicated individuals desecrated all the requirements and protocols of humility. To gain control of the minds of people they bestowed upon themselves and their insignificant and minor teachers the titles of the great masters. To this day, I have not come across any reason that would justify a mystic to sing the praises of his own piety. Where did the title of Religious Reviver of the Millennium (Mujadad- Alf-e-Thani) come from? Who received it and who gave it? Other titles are the Master of the Arabs and the Non Arabs, Leader of the Mystical World, Lord of the Six Dimensions, the Upholder of the Age, the Helper, and the Pole of Existence. All these stations have been claimed by these self-sanctifying parasites. Today these crows flap where eagles once soared. The outward demeanour of these friends of evil is all religious and saintly. As a result of this, the search for truth has become extremely difficult. Intellectual curiosity and endeavour alone can resist and prevail over the seductive captivation of this exploitation of the unsuspecting masses.

Knowledge and scholars have both disappeared. The goals of the Secularist, the Mystic and the Mullah were all different and personal. However in the pursuit of power and status they were all equally ruthless. In using religion they were all cold and calculating. The worst types of sexual corruption, misappropriation of funds and intellectual monstrosities at one time or another reveal the true nature of these groups. Unfortunately, authority still remains with the Secularist and the Mullah. Perhaps the time of Islam has not yet come, and the coming of the Mahdi seems distant.

Islam is not the birthright of the Muslims, nor are the ordinary Muslims the vehicles of the religious scholars' personal desires. Islam belongs to every individual and human being. Wherever anyone is searching for God and whatever path he chooses, it will lead to Islam. The hatred of Islam amongst Non-Muslims is because of the Muslims. During the centuries of killing, fighting and war when Islam and falsehood were locked in battle, Islam transformed from a religion leading to God to become a religion of vested interests and specific nationalities. This was purely the outcome of twisted thinking. This was the same corrupt approach that the Jews and Christians had taken regarding their own

religions. The Jews regarded the religion of Moses and the Torah as personal possessions and acted wrongfully in relation to it. The Book of God was reduced to the commonplace prejudices of different tribes. In the same way the Bible became a victim to the highhanded approach of the Christians. Its Priests created distortions in it to further their own aims. Even though God permits mankind to ponder and reflect upon scripture, yet these exploiters of religion vested themselves with the authority to misinterpret the verses of the Holy Books. The paths leading to the welfare and happiness of all mankind now became means for promoting personal, tribal and nationalistic interests.

In every religion the cleric has always been the least educated in the higher truth. Secularism has always lusted for power. In essence the battle between the secularist and the cleric should have centred on the struggle between the body and the soul. This did not happen, as the ultimate goal of both was to gain power. Although the secularist has the upper hand today, the die-hard Mullah, who possesses an instinctive intelligence which is primitive and natural, knows that secularism can never provide tranquillity to the human mind. It can offer the means to improve the quality of life, but it does not have anything called peace and contentment. This clan of religious pretenders is waiting for the time when the desire of the people for peace and tranquillity will outstrip their hunger for physical necessities. This will be the time when it will leave its protected fortress and once again will make a bid to establish its own authority. In response to this act of history, God and the godly people will be reasserting, as always, the doctrine of priorities in order to face such a major crisis, and this will pave the way for the coming of Mahdi and Jesus.

The Decline and Fall of Religion

The history of the middle ages is a chronicle of Man's lust for power and intellectual tyranny. It is a period characterized by the prominence of religious despotism. The

central concept which fuelled the movements of intellectual regeneration and freedom of thought during the late mediaeval period was the desire to break free from this religious authoritarianism. However, the 'advanced' intellectual approach which the religious reform movements of Europe relied upon to escape from the shackles of religion was not without its own bias. The intense desire to fracture the stronghold of the Papacy and the Clergy led to the adoption of an aggressive, intellectual style of debate, which on occasions resulted in the sacrifice of life and property. The positions adopted by both sides were so extreme and uncompromising that any attempt at mutual understanding was almost impossible.

In contrast, the Muslim world during the middle ages displayed a degree of openness and religious tolerance which far exceeded that of the West. Excepting a few isolated examples it is impossible to find historical incidents in the Islamic world of religious prejudice and hatred which have been worthy of going down in the annals of religious bigotry. In fact it was this tolerance which inspired Christianity to renew its religious thought, particularly after the Ottoman conquest of Constantinople. Thus the transmission of knowledge, originating from the centres of learning such as Cordoba and Baghdad, resulted in illuminating Europe during its 'Dark Ages'.

However, both the movement for religious reform and the renaissance of science lost all sense of proportion, transgressing beyond the limits of sound reasoning. The dawn of the Sun of 'freedom of thought' not only exposed the bigotry and bias of religious thought and opinion, it also popularised the irrational ridiculing of the fundamental tenets of religious faith which went far beyond the legitimate critique of Papal exploitation and authority. In apportioning blame and responsibility against the religious tyranny, the intellectuals of the time did not distinguish between the beliefs of the individuals who were behind the oppression and the universal principles of religion. Instead the latter was subsumed under the former and was not subjected to an independent critique. Secular scholars of the time such as Bradlow identified numerous inconsistencies within the

teachings of Christianity and gradually this influenced the undermining of faith in the truth of religion as a whole.

In the East, sects such as the Mutazilites and the followers of pure reason, influenced by the opinions of the Greek philosophers, sought to find a rational basis for diverting people away from Islam. However, the religion of Islam never came under the complete sway and domination of one particular group or school of thought. With the minor exceptions of a few historical movements, Islam has succeeded in retaining its cosmological world view intact. The situation in Europe however, was such that religious learning slipped out of the hands of the great masters and scholars and fell into the intellectual confines of the blind followers of these intellectual and spiritual pioneers. As a result of this we find that, by the end of the fifteenth century, religion in the West became almost entirely defensive and reactionary in its outlook. In the context of the battle for intellectual and political domination and freedom of choice, Christianity had to admit defeat. The fundamental reason for this was the intellectual stagnation, blind adherence to the outward form of customs and traditions, unfamiliarity with the changes and advancements in learning, and the failure to acknowledge the results of intellectual thought and enquiry of the time. The Church stubbornly refused at any cost to give up the influence it had for centuries exercised over the minds of the ordinary masses; nor was it willing to relinquish some share of this power. In the midst of a climate of a renaissance of scientific learning and radical shifts in intellectual thought, the movements which promoted a secular approach found it relatively easy, with a few minor exceptions, to oblige religion into humbling itself and assuming a diminished role within society.

The situation in the East was entirely different. The main distinguishing feature was the failure of a narrow-minded clerical elite in establishing a complete stronghold on religion. As a consequence, the secular backlash and resulting conflict had an almost negligible impact on religious thought in Islamic society and popular culture. The absence of a popular uprising against religion in the Islamic world was a result of several factors intrinsic to the religion of Islam. Firstly, the simplicity and appeal of its religious

philosophy coupled with a message which was unambiguous and free from internal contradictions. Secondly, the fundamental infrastructure of Islam with its unrelenting emphasis on the welfare, success and happiness of all people was an extremely attractive world view. Thirdly, the intellectual and religious tolerance, within the context of a thriving culture and civilization which was constantly expanding its borders, had a convincing appeal in comparison to the harsh, ruthless and bigoted alternatives of the time. The centres of the Islamic world were characterized by sophisticated social and economic infrastructures, underpinned by justice and fairness: it was a society where even the rights of non-Muslims were safeguarded and protected under Islamic Law. Even in the darkest days of Islamic history, the rights guaranteed by Islam continued to be respected.

In addition to the philosophy and outlook of Islam there was, however, another extremely vital and fundamental factor which diminished the necessity for mass protest and revolution. In fact, it ensured that Islamic society and culture would never be permeated by an extreme version of the basic instinct for 'survival', similar to that which occurred in Europe. This underlying element was the presence of the Quran. It was a text which was beyond the slightest taint of uncertainty, whose every word and letter was above any tampering, and whose intrinsic value as a source of absolute knowledge was never in doubt. Indeed, not even a single dot or letter had been subject to any alteration since the time of the original revelation up till the present day, a period spanning over fifteen centuries.

This characteristic of the Quran was of such an amazing, astonishing and miraculous nature that it set it apart from all other scriptures: it was a fact which the doyens and standard bearers of modern thought could not comprehend or explain away. In comparison to other inspired scriptures, the divine status and reputation of the Quran was evidently clear, and its standard of wisdom and insight was able to withstand any type of critique and scrutiny. When considered alongside the Quran, the scriptures of other faiths appear as though they are the products of individual effort, even though it is

possible to glimpse a ray of the 'mind' of God the Almighty and Exalted in these writings. Despite this, the influence of human agency coupled with the distortions of key passages is discernible.

However, it must be acknowledged that although it is possible to discern the awareness of God's injunctions within the corpus of the other inspired scriptures, it is difficult to perceive within their choice of language and style of exposition anything approximating to the level of the Divine. Furthermore, none of the prophets and sages, who may be regarded as the main mediating instruments of their scriptures, devised or put into place a system which would safeguard the contents of their message. For instance, even though the Torah and the New Testament acquired the rank of being the 'Message of God,' they could not attain the level of being the exact 'letter of God.' Because of this, scholars, disciples and religious authorities of later generations, motivated by selfish egoistic concerns and the desire to attain worldly honour and status, were afforded an opportunity to distort the meanings of scripture through verbal and semantic manipulations. Perhaps, this is why God refers to these scriptures as His 'message' and not as His 'word', and states in the Quran with absolute clarity that He no longer regards these distorted scriptures as worthy of being relied upon, and that if you desire an authoritative and verified account regarding His laws and universal principles, then turn to the Quran.

It may be argued that the difference between the Quran and other divinely inspired books is of such a magnitude that any attempt to equate it with them is unjustifiable. The broad-brush approach adopted by some contemporary critics of regarding all revealed scripture as one and the same, without any rational basis or authentic analysis, is utterly absurd and intellectually flawed. According to the accepted methodology of the intellectual and scientific community, there is no rational justification for the assumption that the text of the Quran is identical and comparable to the contents of other divine scriptures. On further reflection it is evident that not only is the Quran incomparable to other religious revelations, it is also impossible to find, within the entire literary effort

past and present of humanity, a written text which equals the Quran both in significance and authenticity, and its insights on reality.

Despite their reliance on the latest paradigms, theories and techniques of textual criticism, it is these features of the Quran which compelled the pseudo-rationalist faction within the Muslim community to acknowledge that the text of the Quran was free from distortion. Instead, they began to assert that its true meanings had been misinterpreted. Nevertheless, it is a historical fact that the Quran has remained unchanged as regards its accuracy and authenticity, and has been totally free from any kind of distortion or misrepresentation. However, this has meant that in all times and ages it has had to encounter challenges of one kind or another.

Amidst the change and upheaval of history and in periods of progress and decline, the Quran has posed an open challenge to popular and common beliefs, to the conclusions of intellectual struggle and strife, to human curiosity, and to the boundaries of confusion, certainty and doubt. In particular, during times of intellectual advancement and the expansion of human understanding the Quran took a position contrary to that of the 'latest' intellectual revolution, without experiencing intellectual defeat or embarrassment. In fact, no period in human history has been able to declare or demonstrate any shortcomings in the facts of the Quran: even though at times the limitations of human knowledge and understanding have meant that humankind could not access the depth of meaning contained within the Quranic data.

Both the intellectual investigations and 'scientific' discoveries of the middle ages were inherently unreliable and far removed from certainty. For instance, we find that the learning and knowledge promoted and popularised during this era appear nowadays as nothing more than antiquated and obsolete myths. In fact the opinions and views that were presented regarding certain phenomena, in hindsight seem crude and uninformed. Although we must pay tribute to the intellectual curiosity reflected in the mediaeval scholars' research, it is not even remotely possible for us to accept and agree with their

conclusions. The fact that it was, and still is, impossible for anyone to change the words of the Quran, meant that many religious scholars resorted to personal interpretations when undertaking Quranic exegesis. Due to the intellectual shortcomings of some of these commentators, it appeared that certain definitive and conclusive verses of the Quran were open to criticism based on modern scientific research and discoveries. This view was also the result of the absence of true knowledge and insight into reality, and an age which did not accept anything beyond empirical science and physical matter: in the context of a popular *Zeitgeist* which did not recognize the limitations of both scientific instruments and the human intellect. It is worth bearing in mind that, despite these historically and culturally bound criticisms, the conclusive and definitive findings of science and intellectual enquiry as opposed to scientific opinions and theories, in fact confirmed and supported the claims of the Quran and acknowledged the presence of the Almighty. In contrast, the uncovering and deeper understanding of physical phenomena through scientific research and discovery began to reveal glaring inconsistencies between science and the sacred texts of other religious traditions. Faced with this, the followers of these faiths had no choice other than to declare total and blind adherence to their religions and thus expanded the rift between reason and revelation or science and religion.

The hasty and knee-jerk response of the intellectuals and ‘sages’ of the new scientific and secular thinking did not distinguish between various religions, lumping them all together under one critique. Thus European thinkers, and certain ‘sages’ of the East who blindly followed them, declared religion to be a ‘backward’ and regressive notion and tried their utmost to diminish its importance in human affairs. For instance, they proclaimed that all religion was incompatible with scientific reasoning and thought. This claim was and still is entirely baseless and without a shred of truth: it reflected the limited knowledge and ignorance of these ‘scholars’.

The view that all religious teachings were irreconcilable with science had some unfortunate consequences. For instance, a cursory reading of the Quranic text, followed

by a superficial analysis, led to a novel, imitative and short-sighted attitude towards the Quran. As a result of this, religion was declared as outmoded, and its practices deemed to be incapable of practical implementation. Instead, the lifestyles of the modern age predicated on the pursuit of physical pleasures, and animalistic instincts were upheld and promoted. The tragedy was that these scholars and intellectuals regarded the reading and understanding of the Quran as a waste of time. Even those who did read the Quran did not ponder deeply on its wisdom and remained within the confines of its recitation and the appreciation of its rhythmic beauty, whilst some religious folk used the Quran primarily as a means to attain a livelihood. Moreover, there were those, who on the basis of their narrow-minded and sectarian interpretations reduced this great source of inspired wisdom and knowledge to fit within the dogmatic parameters of their particular school of thought.

Despite their limited capacity for balanced and rigorous intellectual thought, the teachers and dons of these religious schools attempted to raise the profile of their intellectual status and credentials by resorting to the use of inflated and hyperbolic titles and appellations. Furthermore, they proclaimed that their unenlightened and superficial interpretations were above any shortcomings or criticism. Not only did they drag the Quran down to the level and standard of their self-centred writings, they also succeeded in erecting such robust barriers and walls of intellectual prejudice and bigotry which diverted the Muslim Ummah from understanding the reality of the cosmos, miring them instead, in the rut of mundane and humdrum issues. The adversaries and critics of religion, who were without doubt immensely more educated and intelligent than the teachers of the religious schools, fell into the trap of regarding the limited and unenlightened interpretations of these narrow-minded teachers as the ultimate benchmark and standard of the Quran. Based upon this they proclaimed that Islam as a religion was characterized by bigotry and extremism. It seemed that it was now the turn of Islam to bear the brunt of the secular critique, since Christianity and other major religions had already been reduced to the level of mere custom and tradition, with no

significant role to play in civilized society. Communism and socialism had forced themselves into the minds of people in a similar fashion to the intellectual tyranny of the middle Ages, and this approach to life was purely restricted to the materialistic aspects of human existence, declaring that all the metaphysical and cosmic realities of the religion of Islam were no more than ancient fairy tales. Instead, they firmly believed that their philosophy of materialism was the ultimate truth, and pointed to the abject condition of the Muslims coupled with their limited contributions as evidence of their success and the truth of their arguments. However, since communism was at the same time undertaking an ideological battle with countries following the European model which promoted opposing values such as social independence, freedom of thought and free trade, it was inevitable that it would lose this battle because of its short-sightedness and limited materialistic approach to human life.

After the fall of communism, it was only a matter of time before the secular culture of the West came face to face with Islam. The fact was that the military resources of Islam were few and its intellectual resources were even fewer. On the other hand, the widespread opportunities for ease, comfort and luxury available in a secular culture had quickly tempted people towards it. The values of religion were declared as enemies of freedom of thought and personal liberty. Faced with this relentless secular onslaught, Christianity had no choice but to compromise; in order to survive it had to learn to live at the mercy of a free and secular culture. In a very short time it accepted defeat, with the result that we find that religion in free secular societies merely exists as a personal and private inclination. What is more, it morally degraded itself to such a level that it felt obliged to give its approval and blessing to extremely reprehensible acts such as homosexuality.

The religion of God, known as Islam, holds no complaint or bitterness against others. Its lament is that it has been held hostage by the arrogance, ostentation and posturing of its adherents. Having abandoned and cast aside the higher aims and goals of life, the Muslim Ummah has been consumed by the scourge of sectarianism. The tyranny and dictatorship of partisan religious scholars (Mullahism) strived to extinguish the qualities

of sincerity and thinking within the Muslim Ummah. The Muslims have been diverted from the fundamental goals of religion, and with the passing of each day, erect new schools and seminaries devoted to a particular interpretation of the faith. People of mediocre thinking exploit religion for personal power and glory, and even the most highly respected religious institutions of learning are fanning the flames of bigotry and sectarianism. The act of separating God from religion has encouraged within all the religious movements of modern times a cult of secrecy on the style of freemasonry, exclusivity centred around a figure head, and a personal perspective promoted as a universal truth.

The Muslim world has not transformed into a society without religion, but it has been infected with religious paralysis. It has become an arena in which ideologies from every corner of the globe are reflected and contested. This has resulted in the trivialization and belittling of religion. For instance, Muslim society displays a greater willingness to accept and adopt the beliefs of scientific and political theories in comparison to those of religion. In fact, it clearly communicates its desire to follow common and conventional styles of thinking instead of religion. Suffering from the twin curses of an illiterate population and extreme underdevelopment, the governments of Islamic countries show more interest in holding on to political power and promoting nationalism, instead of bettering their people through a deep understanding of religion.

A handful of individuals and 'thinkers' are driving the intellectual thought processes of the Muslim Ummah: the majority of whom are beguiled by Western ideals and concepts. They are devoid of personal identity and lack the capacity to conceive of an effective and alternative vision. Standing shoulder to shoulder, both the narrow-minded rulers and these 'intellectuals', having been educated in the lecture halls of Europe and having 'tasted the freedom of western culture,' are working relentlessly to create a secular society. What is happening in reality is that they are creating a new 'church' in opposition to the model of religion espoused by the shortsighted and poorly educated 'scholars' of Islam. This battle for the hearts and minds of Muslim society is conducted at all levels. In the name

of personal freedom and liberty, mass media and modern communications technology is actively engaged in a struggle to popularise, at a grass roots level, the notion of a 'free' society. The biggest thorn in the side of this campaign is religion.

This clash of values is not merely in the East or the West, but is visible at all levels and within every Islamic country. Nevertheless, Islam stands tall, as though it awaits the coming of those who possess, like the first generation of Muslims, minds suffused with sincerity, purity and clarity, and who will raise high the banner of God's love and create an Islamic society in harmony with human nature: an exemplary society the like of which has never been witnessed before either on terrestrial land or the starry firmament, in which the love and recognition of God would form the backbone of religion. It would be a society in which power would lie not with force and oppression, but with knowledge and understanding; wherein, as well as bettering the conditions of this physical, temporary and short spanned life on earth, preparations would also be made for the never-ending, everlasting life beyond the grave; where there would be no cause for stress, anxiety and emotional upheaval, other than the normal concerns of life and death; wherein the words 'compassion' and 'blessing' would attain their full meaning. The creation of such a society is not merely the dreams of a utopian paradise, without historical precedence. The culture and society of the Prophetic era and that of the rightly guided Khalifahs is a historical fact. However, it is a sad observation that this is the only historical realization of the vision of Islam, and one which has never been repeated in succeeding generations.

The Origin of Intelligence

There are many motives which drive people to seek education. For some it is a means of acquiring a livelihood, gaining status and respect. Others want more than this. They want education to lead to enlightenment and salvation. There are two approaches which can be

taken. Firstly, the path of initiation into a religious order or group. People of this temperament place their trust in others and are content to be shown the way along the 'straight path' to reach their final goal. The alternative method is to acquire the skills and qualities which will enable you to discover the path of guidance for yourself. This approach allows you to evaluate beliefs and ideas, arrive at your own conclusions and avoid the pitfalls of blind faith.

Human beings possess all the tools they need to discover the truth for themselves. Their survival depends on the use of the faculties that God, the Prime Teacher, has bestowed on them. Out of His grace, God entrusted destitute and vulnerable humanity with the faculty of intellect. He placed in them the awareness of how to utilise it (for example, through the use of observation and experimentation). The capacity to learn from the experiences of the past, present and future is a powerful instrument in the intellectual tool kit of Man. In this way the survival of Man was guaranteed. How else could a weak and dependent creature maintain its dominance when surrounded by dangers?

It was the intellect which urged early Man to seek knowledge and understanding. It encouraged him to reflect on his experience and develop better ways of doing things. Above all it pushed him to go beyond the concerns of daily survival and discover his higher self: to pursue the path of self-realisation. In the animal kingdom we find that some species of animals are also able to learn from their experiences. This allows them to adjust their behaviour. What they cannot do is use this experience in a context not dictated by their animal instincts, that is, go beyond issues of eating, drinking and mating. For instance, after centuries of being dominated by Man has any species of animal been able to utilise their experience to free themselves from being exploited? Has it been possible for any animal to shake the burden of its human masters and create a world in which it is completely safe and secure? In contrast, human beings have attained supremacy over the Earth. This is due to the extraordinary and superior faculty of the intellect. It has enabled Man to be the unchallenged master of the Earth. No other creature has dared to question his authority.

If the intellect is the secret behind mankind's power on Earth, then we must ask where did it come from? Was it an innate ability within Man? Was it bestowed on Man? The Quran informs us in the following verse that the faculty of the intellect and consciousness is a trust which was offered to the whole of creation, who shuddered at the responsibility it entails and therefore refused to accept it. Man on the other hand was foolish and accepted the burden:

We did indeed offer the trust to the heavens and the earth and the mountains; but they refused to undertake it, being afraid thereof: but man undertook it; He was indeed unjust and foolish (33: 72)

This verse also shows that the intellect is not an inherent quality of Man and that it is false to assume that mankind has always had personal ownership rights over it. There is an allusion that Man has been given possession of this faculty in this world and in the next world he will not have free use of it. The key point is that the intellect is given as a trust to Man and this entails certain responsibilities. For instance, to utilise it only to satisfy your ego and animal self is an abuse of this trust. There is an expectation that Man will deploy his mind to understand his purpose in life and to discover his creator. If not, he must remember that what is given can also be taken away. There is a force from which the intellect originates. Who is the real owner? The answer: God.

Modern discoveries in the field of physical anthropology support the view that the intellect has not always been an inherent quality of mankind. Research shows that there is little difference between the characteristics of early human beings, including earlier species of primates, and other species of animal. Human Beings trace their biological ancestry to the species known as 'Homo'. This species existed for millennia without showing any evidence of intellectual activity that set it apart from others. It was only about seven thousand years ago when farming was discovered, that mankind became distinguishable from animals. The intellect of Man from then on begins to emerge as a

dominant factor in the world. As God reminds us in the Quran, mankind existed on the Earth for a very long time when they were not even worthy of being mentioned.

Has there not been over man a long period of time, when He was (Not even worth) mentioning? (70: 1)

The physical make up of mankind is subject to the general laws of biology through which God has created animal life. These are the laws (Sunnahs) of Allah in creation. Like everything else, human beings start from a single cell which then splits and becomes an organism consisting of two cells. The Quran informs us that God has created everything in pairs: male and female, positive and negative, electrons and protons, inner and outer. This duality is visible everywhere and is not specific to humans or animals. For instance plants have a male and female part that facilitates pollination.

Not only does Man share his physical constitution with animals he also has an affinity with minerals. The Quran tells us that Man was made from clay. This means that he consists of certain minerals. The evolution of life from simple to complex forms can be seen as a movement along the spectrum of minerals, plants and animals. Each one possesses a feature not possessed by the previous one. For instance, rocks are solid and do not have the quality of growth, while plants have the ability to grow but not the capacity to move like animals. There is always a duality between things which have one cell or two, then between those that are motionless and those that can move, then those who have the ability to speak and those that do not, then between those who have sight and audition and those who do not. So far, Man has no distinguishing feature. Most animals can move, produce sounds, and have hearing and sight. For thousands of years Man was identical to animals. There was nothing which made him different.

The story of life continued to unfold, millennia after millennia. Then, all of a sudden, something amazing occurs which will affect the course of life on Earth forever. A unique and extraordinary change is making itself felt. Out of the blue, Man gains intelligence.

He begins to think. The suddenness of this event is beyond human explanation. Scientists are unable to provide an answer to the questions of when, why and how this unbelievable event occurred. Despite the advances in scientific knowledge, we are still unable to pinpoint the moment when the members of the genus *Homo* began to use the intellect. It is in religion alone that we find an answer to this question.

No one but God can give a satisfying answer relating to the origins of natural phenomena. For instance, why is a walnut a walnut and why is the almond the way it is? Evolutionary processes may partially explain the minor changes between generations of specific species. However, what they cannot account for is the sheer size and extent of the variety and diversity in the forms of life scattered across every corner of the world. There are around a billion species of creatures, and each one of them points towards some meaning and purpose in life. Granted that our knowledge of the diversity of life on Earth is limited, our understanding of the human being is even more rudimentary. Every so often, sciences such as biology, psychology, sociology and neurology shed a glimmer of light and take us one step closer to understanding ourselves. But this only increases our awareness of how little we know. Despite our discoveries, we are plunged into the realm of speculation, as our limited intellects are unable to comprehend the workings of the Absolute Intellect, God.

The acquisition of the intellect by the human species was a remarkable turning point in the history of the world. This ape-like creature, who until very recently was indistinguishable from other species of animals, now displayed self-consciousness, went on to lay the foundations of towns, cities, and mighty civilisations, to erect grand monuments and 'wonders' of the world, and to develop laws and systems for social existence. Having been the ultimate manifestation of brutality and barbarism, this bipedal creature began to display signs of humanity. There was no doubt that this special quality of '*Homo Sapiens*' set them apart from every other species and creature on the planet, ensuring their status as rulers and vicegerents of the Earth. As well as this, the members of this species became susceptible to the clash of good and evil, right and wrong.

However, little did Man comprehend the price to be paid for this special quality, and the accountability that it entailed. To what end should this faculty which had not belonged to our species for half of our history and which had given us the privilege of leadership and authority on earth, be utilised? Was it to be used to further the ambitions of human greed and arrogance? Was it the case that this attribute of the intellect was our personal birth right, and the purpose behind its cultivation and refinement was to subjugate the physical world, its rocks and minerals, vegetation and forests, birds and fowl, and animals and livestock. After having satisfied our physical needs, was the higher purpose of the intellect to aid us in seizing power and authority, wealth and resources, even at the expense of death, destruction and disaster? Was this the ultimate function of the intellect, or was there some other purpose to it?

The real purpose of the intellect has been conveyed repeatedly throughout history, and with equal regularity it has been ignored and forgotten. The knowledge of this purpose was not the result of our rational investigations; rather its source was an external, supra-human intuition and inspiration. Throughout history we witness the long line of prophets, reformers, and saints who dedicated their lives to the teaching and instruction of humankind. They frequently reminded people of the message which had been forgotten. The crux of the message was that the intellect you have been given is not your personal possession, but you hold it in trust. Although the utilisation of this trust is lawful and permissible for you, its wrongful use will result in a prolonged period of suffering for you. On the other hand correct use of it will entitle you to a life of eternal happiness.

What did God want in return for bestowing the intellect on Man? One thing is certain: He did not want the wealth and pleasures which Man amasses for himself through the use of this gift. Of course it would have been fair to levy some form of tax on these things. But the bounty of God has no limits. The value of the intellect cannot be measured in currencies of gold and silver. Was the price of this blessing that Man exile himself from his home, family and friends, devoting himself exclusively to God? What

God wants in return for the intellect is simple. He wants to test Man to see how well he utilises the intellect in his capacity as steward of God on Earth. This cannot be done without first recognising God. In short, God wants Man to sit an examination in the school of life. The following verse alludes to this:

He who created death and life, that He may try which of you is best in deed: and He is the Exalted In Might, Oft-Forgiving. (67:2)

Unlike most examinations, the question paper of this exam is slim and the answers required are straightforward. What is more, both the questions and the answers have been given to students. Their task is to confirm and corroborate the answer by finding supporting evidence and proofs. These may be from the universe around them or from within themselves, and this is where the intellect comes in. As if giving the right answer was not enough, God has also shown us what the wrong response looks like. There is really no reason why anyone should fail this test! The onus is on us to make the right choice. This element of choice is alluded to in the Quranic verse:

We showed Him the way: whether He be grateful or ungrateful (70:3)

In comparison to other students, the learners in the 'Earth school' have unparalleled advantages designed to ensure their success. The conditions of the examination hall are extremely favourable to them as there is no invigilator, every inch and corner of the hall is covered with signs and reminders; not to mention that at every step of the way they have been supported by tutors who have pointed them in the right direction; and there is also the constant and regular revision of the course books. Indeed, to overcome the problems of forgetfulness and lack of understanding, they have been provided with intellectual tools and learning support of every kind to ensure that they thoroughly understand the message. In all fairness, everything possible has been done and no effort spared in removing all conceivable barriers which could prevent humankind from fulfilling the purpose of their intellect, namely, the recognition and realization of God. From a human

perspective, the acceptance of a supra-human reality and intelligence (God) is a concept which is easy to both comprehend and accept. In fact the desire for meaning and understanding of reality is woven into the psyche of Man.

Is it not a catastrophe that despite being blessed with the intellect and possessing knowledge; and despite the guidance of a teacher and the presence of clear signs and landmarks, Man is still characterised by ignorance of God and injustice towards himself and others? Why is it that in the struggle between the intellect and the reptilian Self represented by ignorance, the latter should be victorious? The outcome of this battle was nothing but loss and destruction. As a consequence, with the exception of a limited number of individuals, the majority of intellectuals and thinkers manipulated the meaning of the word 'progress' and confined it to the physical and material aspects of life. The intellect became a tool of corruption and discord: it ensured that deception and deceit, injustice and oppression, tyranny and dictatorship became the hallmark of humankind.

Mankind was in breach of trust: they had failed to fulfil the obligation of worship and reverence, a condition of possessing the faculty of reason. The human species has degraded itself to an unprecedented level. We have turned out to be no better than Shaytaan who claimed, on the basis of physical appearance and 'racial' difference, that 'Adam' was inferior. The prejudice, hatred and racism prevalent amongst the various groups and nations of mankind are reminiscent of the stance and outlook of Shaytaan.

The deceit and treachery of the human ego re-created on Earth the same levels of arrogance and defiance which were witnessed when Shaytaan rebelled against God concerning the creation of Adam. In fact the situation of the human is worse, since Shaytaan had never denied his servitude and the Majesty of God. Whereas Man prostrated himself at the 'Temple of Ego' and throughout the ages was not only persistent in his denial of God but insisted on proclaiming his own 'Godhood.' One can only feel pity and sympathy for the human being, for he is plagued with this inflated view

of himself. What hope of compassion is there for such a self centred egomaniac, other than the phrase 'God is the 'Rabb' (Originator, Sustainer and Supporter) of the cosmos, the All-Compassionate, the All-Merciful?'

The Destructive Self

Deliberation and reflection on the human self has continued unabated over the centuries. From the time when self-realisation was linked to the recognition of God, the wayfarers in the procession of divine passion began to search for salvation in the enchanting and tempting vastness of the human Self. This enigma has continued to engage mankind under the guise of various names, such as, self-consciousness, deep understanding and self-realisation. Few, however, have succeeded in attaining to the depth of its meanings: whilst those who were afraid of it, grew more in terror as their understanding of it grew.

Those that did gain some knowledge of it found the Nafs to be the archenemy of Man, dominating every aspect of his life: the lawful and unlawful; good and evil; chaos and order; poverty and opulence; war and peace; the positive and the negative. Further, they witnessed it in the pomp and glory of the victorious and in the wretchedness of the vanquished; in the sublime knowledge and wisdom and in the prejudices of the populace; in the dignity and awe of Kings, and in the petitions of the penniless; in the refined style of wordsmiths and in the vulgar tongues of the rabble; in the romance of love and beauty and in the backdrop of libidinal desires. In short the influence of this corrupting self was felt everywhere.

The question arises: What was its origin? And what is its true nature?

The issue was not always that complicated. Over aeons of time animal characteristics firmly lodged themselves in the inner consciousness of Man. To such an extent that

human life, which began on the basis of survival and self-defence, was unable to shed these characteristics even in the midst of the most advanced social and economic structures. All human systems, no matter how supportive they appear, have in some fundamental way aided and supported some aspect of the Nafs.

Despite the change of battlefield and type of contest, the conclusion of the struggle between Man and beast was replaced by the struggle of mutual rivalry between Homo Sapiens. Before this time, Man, on a collective level, was as one single body fiercely upholding his individuality in the face of opposition from other forms of life. Emotions of generosity and kindness grew in strength alongside the spirit of rebellion and arrogance: survival is avarice for life. Furthermore, the sense of survival that the Prophet Suleyman (PBUH) witnessed in the procession of ants surged like a herd of wild elephants in its diverse and varicoloured forms in the character traits of Man.

Knowledge and wisdom failed to release the human Self, which had its origins in the struggle for survival, from the mindset of survival. Instead, it altered the means of achieving the same goal. For instance the entire fields of arts and sciences, which attained mastery in the understanding of physical reality, and all the methods adopted by civilised Man, all had their centre and focal point in the promotion of ease, comfort and the strengthening of the Self. The Self constructed channels which would promote sympathy and affection within Man in its favour, and would be regarded as the ultimate standards of humanity.

How could Man possibly regard as an enemy that which had seeped into his consciousness, becoming a fundamental part of his life and was now flowing within his blood and veins? Despite the exhortations to adopt the path of guidance, it was an extremely difficult challenge for Man to see himself as his own enemy. Indeed, for whom should he wage this war on himself and for what reward: 'friendship' of God and an unseen paradise! Moreover, the human self depends for its support on outward causes. It convinces and influences Man through the agency of the five senses. As a result, Paradise

was seen as a mirage and an empty promise, impossible to test before death, not to mention God and the intellect, which were far removed from the ambit of the five senses and the boundaries of the heart and vision.

The Nafs is another name for the nerve centre of Man: it is his childhood, his youth and his old age. Indeed, the human self is a 'packet' of needs and wants. It is a defence system, resting on the basic instincts of Man, which has, since prehistoric times, become so powerful that the entire body of science and knowledge cannot withstand its defence weaponry. Lurking in the 'trench' of survival this warrior is familiar with the strategies needed to ward off all the assaults of knowledge and reason. However, its greatest weapon is to show sympathy and affection to its 'victim'. This then, is a war which Man has no desire to win. There is no compensation or blood money forthcoming for the one who is slain. In the words of the Generous Lord: 'I created my biggest enemy in the form of Man'. Indeed, the inner consciousness of Man is ruled by this Dajjal and his acts of construction are in truth acts of destruction. This Anti-Christ dwells in both you and me. The statement 'I am' is an expression of its individuality, for it divides both people and the person and is the personality of every individual. It can be glimpsed in the scholar's boastings of his knowledge, in the depraved behaviour of the ignorant, in the ascetic's display of piety, in the man of letters' desire for fame, and in the prince's desire for power and glory.

Psychologists attempted to understand the workings of this bundle of instincts. They searched for the underlying principles of Man's reactions and behaviour. They subjected his feelings to the theories of 'inferiority' and 'superiority'. Discovering in the process a whole host of complexes, phobias, neuroses, psychoses, fantasies and evil whisperings, insanity and madness, lurking in the mind of Man. Further, they searched for the fundamental causes of fear and depression.

But why?

Their goal was neither to find God nor to explore the self in order to find God. It was merely to activate, to reinvigorate, and to strengthen the Self which had become passive, downtrodden, defeatist and inactive. This was simply so that it could once more resume the struggle for survival. However, the main distinguishing factor between psychologists and Sufis is that the former seek to understand the Self for the sake of the Self, whereas, the latter seek to understand it so that they can place it in the service of God. Moreover, Nafs and desire are two inseparable companions and together they carve out the priorities and preferences of the Nafs, to the extent that desires, bosom companions of Satan, can affect and alter the 'seasons' of the Nafs. The nature of the Nafs is that it craves to dominate others. It jealously guards its own possessions, yet it seeks to plunder the property of others. Set aside clemency and forbearance: all the civilised behaviour of the Nafs is nothing but 'camouflage' and defensive ploys. It is the governor of the province of 'No Mercy' and 'No Remorse.' Appeals for clemency only add fuel to its tyranny. Further, in defeat it turns dangerous and seeks to inflict injury on others. The full brunt of its enmity is directed towards the alien soul which originates from an alien place and dwells within its territory. It exerts its entire efforts to prevent the Soul from returning to its source of origin.

In contrast, the choice and priorities of the soul are clear and eminently superior. It possesses the consciousness of the One God, and despite being imprisoned in a physical body its yearning for the divine presence never ceases. The Nafs seeks to wipe out this memory and longing and, like the Angels imprisoned in the chasm of Babel, the subjugation of the spirit to the body and mind is its fundamental goal. In this struggle for Man's humanity, the Nafs seeks assistance from Satan by occupying the pathways leading to the Sublime Assembly of Angels (Mala 'Alaa). Moreover, benefiting from centuries of experience in this struggle, the Nafs becomes a terrifying social force whom none has the power to subjugate save God. As the Prophet Yusuf (PBUH) said:

Nor do I absolve My own self (of blame): the (human) self is certainly prone to evil, unless My Lord do bestow His mercy: but surely my Lord is Oft-forgiving, Most Merciful. (12:53)

None is spared from the attacks of the Nafs, for the Nafs always commands evil, only those for whom God has mercy are saved from it. Thus only divine intervention can protect the soul from the domination of the acquisitive and merciless Nafs.

God has declared war on this enemy and has made it known that one who yearns for His love and intimacy must oppose the Nafs no matter what form it takes or what strategy it employs. In every age, the Nafs drapes the 'corpses' of its devotees in the latest style of shrouds: if not as Olympus, Brahman, Shiva and Vishnu, Ashtar and Isis, then as the models of abstract philosophies. If not in the worship of physical objects, then in the festivals of culture and tradition, in the complementary understanding of ecstasy and sobriety, and in the interaction between literature and homosexuality. Today, in our day and age, in the labelling of oppression and injustice as civilisation and the mass media's propaganda as truth, in the movements of indecency and obscenity promoted in the name of art, idol worship parades under the guise of the fine arts, and any mention of God is dubbed backwardness. Indeed, these phenomena are master strokes of the Nafs, and executed with the utmost of ease.

The tyrannical Nafs is always close. So it comes as no surprise when we witness it in the poet's smile on receiving applause for his poetry; in the writer's eye, as it sparkles in a literary assembly held in his honour; in the politician's hand as it waves to a cheering crowd; in the humble nod of the holy man's head, when the praises of his piety are sung; and in the champion who puffs his chest in pride at the rehearsal of his achievements. In all these situations the Nafs is in extremely close contact. Furthermore, when the Nafs enters our consciousness, God withdraws. For proximity to the Nafs means only distancing from God, the distance between Heaven and Hell, the distinction between the Rahman (Allah) and the Shaytaan, between the forces of evil and the forces of good, and in the conflict between light and darkness. Thus the manifestations of the Nafs are unlimited.

Consider the pieces on a chessboard. Despite being limited to just a few pieces, the numbers of possible moves that can be made are, perhaps, over a billion. Similar is the case of the Nafs. Consisting of a few fundamental instincts common to both humans and animals, the mutual interactions and permutations of these handfuls of instincts are unlimited. According to one mystic, 'to this day I have not fathomed two things: the stations of rank of Muhammad (PBUH), and the forms of deception employed by the Nafs.' However, individual instincts acting on their own cannot exert influence and control over the Nafs without the mutual involvement of other motivating instincts. From all of these, desire is the ultimate driving force of the Nafs, and it operates on ever more sophisticated levels as Man becomes more 'educated and cultured'. It reaches a stage where it goes beyond the control system of the fundamental balance placed inside Man. When this occurs, destruction becomes its second nature.

The Nafs, nevertheless, does not deceive: rather it is sincere in its deception, since both its scientific and emotional natures are closely intertwined. Furthermore, its governing principles are plain and evident, namely that the survival instinct does not recognize any moral values. It has, from time immemorial, been accompanied by all the aides and supporters it requires to maintain its continued existence: envy, rancour, slander, anger, rage and lust. Not a single one of them will ever betray the Nafs, operating universally without distinction of race and religion. Despite fluctuations in the severity and vigilance of their attacks, their aims undergo no such change and remain stable. For instance, their collaboration does not always lead to killing and bloodshed, but envy does not permit even a shred of compassion to enter its dealings.

These qualities stand diametrically opposed to the attributes of God and are devoid of any sense of reverence. Their field of work is restricted and their horizons extremely limited. The sublime sense of tranquillity is rarely witnessed in the conduct of these instincts which, akin to a blazing forest fire, seek to scorch and ravage instantly everything in their path, offering no opportunities to stop and pause. Its flames are fanned by the winds of egoism, defiance and self-respect. The latter is perhaps the most

puzzling and in need of further investigation. It is an interesting and amusing fact that the vast majority of people regard 'self-respect' as an admirable attribute. The truth, however, is that the notion of self-respect is a 'Palace of Glass' built on the twin foundations of luxury or ease, and a sense of inferiority. Indeed, we do not possess a criterion to assess the self, for it constructs itself by exploiting the crisis and insecurities which we experience in our lives, from childhood into old age. The Nafs adopts the path of antagonism or the path of harmony towards its victim, depending on its situation, and becomes itself the raw material for the manufacture of 'self-respect'.

In this scenario 'self-respect' becomes a highly intricate psychological concern. Despite the fact that the Nafs can be regarded as a factor of great significance and weight, it can, nevertheless, be fully understood in the early stages of its development and before a man becomes 'cultured and educated'. With the growth of skills, education and new outlooks in a person, the Nafs begins to resort to a greater degree of sophistication in its 'technical' capacities. Consequently, the acquisition of knowledge and art leads to the development of increasingly refined and enigmatic emotions. When united with personal and self-influenced preferences, these feelings result in the Nafs going beyond the scope of accountability.

This is the phase in which one's entire spiritual prowess and thinking becomes a target for manipulation by the Nafs. For no one can surpass it in the hatching of reasons to justify itself. Exploiting the whole spectrum of values of good and evil, the human Self displays the results of its handiwork everywhere: pride, arrogance, detestation of others and their opinions, ostentation and show, the hunger for power, assigning importance to oneself, scientific and intellectual boasting, surrounding oneself by like-minded people, creating 'mirages' through speech and manipulation of emotions, creating divisions among people, self-love, material opulence, the pandering after choice, the designation of identified approaches to various branches of learning, and in the latest styles of culture and civilisation. We witness the handiwork of the Nafs wherever we turn.

In the western intellectual climate, despite its advancement, longing for power and fame is regarded as a fundamental part of human nature. Thus receiving praise for one's achievements and striving one's utmost for this goal is seen as something noble and worthwhile. Similarly, in the East the endless list of honorific titles at all levels is an evident illustration of the Self's handiwork. No religious scholar, thinker or professional sees any harm in receiving these titles, whose very roots lie in flattery and hyperbole, which ultimately originates in the Self's flattery and praise of the admirers themselves. Both the mystic and the cynic view the intrusions of the Nafs with ridicule and derision. Despite his mockery and sarcasm of the Self, the cynic cannot, however, shelter himself from being consumed by the flames of envy and anger, a product of the Self's counter attack. In contrast, the mystic neutralises the states and feelings induced by the Self through the adoption of a sublime philosophy of life, intellectual modesty, and achieving balance in life. Furthermore, the cynic resists the Self like a diseased man who shows contempt towards everyone who is healthy. The mystic, walking under the shade of divine love and affection, does not regard his merits over others as deriving from his own person, but rather he considers all notions of excellence and pre-eminence as a trust and favour from God. Thus he is preserved from the destructive emotions of arrogance and conceit, for he realises too well that any claim to 'superiority' (godhood) based on borrowed 'goods' is transitory and groundless.

The Nafs does, however, have its rivals. Humour is a deadly poison for the Nafs for it possesses an equal footing to the greatness and superiority of the Self. Of course, humour can act as a tool of the Nafs in many ways: finding faults and weaknesses in others, assassination of their character, creating scandals, invading the privacy of others, and gaining pleasure by degrading others. These are amongst the favourite pastimes of humour. However, when it turns its gaze on itself, it succeeds in breaking the enchanting spell of 'self-sympathy and support'. Digging its heels in the trenches of self-deception and self-centredness, it deals heavy and sustained blows to the scheming Self. Is not the one who can laugh at himself a thousand times better than one who laughs at the expense

of another? The Nafs routinely ignores its own defects and yet is constantly vigilant of its status and standing. However, this watchdog over the Nafs is above morals of right and wrong, oblivious to honour or disgrace, even-handed in times of want and plenty. It flourishes merely through the complete aid and assistance of God. Humour recognises that hopes and aspirations are not the function of the needy, for their period of duration is not long: nor does it attribute its aptitude and ability as originating from itself; nor claim the right of ownership over loaned 'goods,' nor does it regard life on Earth as perpetual. Further, it regards the ultimate goal of knowledge as the achievement of balance and equilibrium in life.

Thus, humour prevents the Nafs from displaying sympathy towards itself and obliges it to accept its shortcomings. It tolerates each and every person in accordance with his or her intellectual capacities. The single most important factor behind the pervasive influence, in the present age of conditions such as impetuosity, discontent, depression and boredom, is the refusal of self-accountability, promotion of self-absorption, the desire for ease and comfort, and in the displacement of reverence by the desire to become God. Despite the acceptance of the Eternal and All-Governing God, indifference and active striving against His guidance, management and submission leads us to assume personal, splintered and self-centred ideas, as well as the adoption of negative lifestyles. As a result, there is bloodshed and destruction, intense emotions of dissatisfaction, insomnia, and memory loss. The present age is deeply suffering from these factors.

The Nafs does not deceive; rather the phases of trial and testing that the children of Adam have to undergo are of two types: the static and the dynamic. The former 'technology' is centred on the Self, whilst the latter is under the control and guidance of Shaytaan. The technology of the Nafs is characterised as static since it does not possess any originality both in its aims and its methods. From pre-eternity until the genesis of Man the Self, yearning for everlasting life, led Man astray. The outcast Shaytaan manifested this yearning in the time and space dimensions of Paradise with the result that Adam was distanced from the vicinity of God.

The Self furnishes and prepares the ground in which Shaytaan sows the seeds of corruption, followed by the growth of the sturdy tree of 'repulsive desires.' It is a poisonous 'shrub' which destroys the healthy harvest of knowledge and understanding. The lethal success of the Nafs rests primarily on the mind of Man and the lack of knowledge and ignorance of the commands and counsels of the Generous Lord. God, like a Great and Eminent Teacher, does not employ compulsion in the matters He has given choice to Man. Indeed, it would not have been difficult for God to make the whole of Mankind accept His guidance. None would have the power to refuse, nor even to contemplate it. Even the notion of disobedience would not exist.

If this had been the case, the purpose of education would not have been achieved, since the fundamental goal of education is to develop the capacity to make right choices. For instance, giving a man no choice and then passing judgement on him, would be an arbitrary and pointless system and God is certainly not inequitable. Thus Man was provided with opportunities to develop his intellectual capacity through a variety of supportive and encouraging methods. Alongside this, the Self too was equipped with the capacity to sense loss and express regret. From time to time it is possible for this capacity to lead Man to awareness, and offer him, yet again, another opportunity to regain his sense of balance and soundness.

In short, this human saga in God's view consists merely of three possibilities: sin or error, the sense of regret, and repentance and forgiveness. Can there be anyone more unjust than the one who knows he has wronged, knows that his repentance will be accepted, and still fails to make amends for his loss and failures? It is this injustice and ignorance alluded to by God in the Quran as the 'trust' of knowledge bestowed on Man. The rehabilitation of Man and inspiring him towards it by means of hardship is at least in God's wisdom not a possibility, since hardship can itself lead to a kind of enmity and the harbouring of hidden notions of pride and arrogance. Indeed, sacrificing ones life is not such a worthwhile action and, certainly not one which leads to deserving the proximity and closeness of God. If this were the case, the sturdy bull which drives the oil press

would surely be the greatest mystic and knower of God! The Self adulterates logical necessity with false claims and demands, making it a constituent part of Shaytaan's repertoire.

In any case, God regards Man as superior to beasts and animals, and intellect as the most distinguished part of his creation. Deliberation and reflection offers Man the capacity to make his choices more freely and autonomously. Although the Nafs promotes the currency of its transitory preferences and priorities, recognising true identity is a product of the efforts of ones Fitrah (primordial nature) and balanced intellectual curiosity. However, the Nafs does possess a vulnerability which can be exploited by the people of knowledge. It is this weakness which can be utilised to temper its excesses and halt the flow of its destructive tendencies, namely that the Nafs possesses, more than any other desire, intense curiosity and inquisitiveness. It is continuously engaged in the acts of smelling, tasting and finding out. It seeks amazing and bewildering sensations and occurrences, always hungry for new experiences, and it has a passion for individuality. This passion drives it to seek knowledge of the world and its surroundings and occasionally directs it to tread the path leading to God.

By utilising the Self's inquisitiveness and curiosity, its level of knowledge and training can be increased, thus distinguishing it from the common masses and the poorly educated. It resembles a wild predatory beast almost impossible to tame. However, it is not uncommon to observe that even wild and predatory animals such as lions, wolves, wild dogs, and poisonous snakes can be reared as pets. In the early stages of training, and despite its willingness, the Self revolts and refuses to submit on account of its original characteristics. It unceasingly struggles to act according to its former tendencies and habits. Similarly, in the early stages of its 'nurturing' the Nafs should not be driven by any sublime and worthy ideals, rather its curiosity should be used to make it seek and strive harder.

After the completion of its training and the adoption of new habits and tendencies, the Nafs is eager to stamp its individuality and distinguish itself from others. With the passage of time and growth of knowledge the Nafs begins to develop love and affection for this new approach and internalises it as a permanent and freely chosen practice. This developmental stage of the Self's thought, leads to the desire to seek the friendship of God. The ideas of this new 'world' and the discovery of new horizons prevent the Self from abandoning this choice for divine longing. All the while, its original instincts are striving to pull it back to its days of ignorance (Jahiliyya). However, the strength and fortitude of the new practices keep it steadfast on the path towards God. Further, through the mercy and support of God, tranquillity and inspiration descends upon the Self. This unexpected blessing is one that the human self has never tasted before. It is now that its purpose in life becomes crystal clear and its beliefs and thoughts clarified. Indeed, ultimate consciousness is attained.

However, this phase is not without its own perils and dangers. Righteousness, coupled with the intense desire for piety and the hardships of the struggle for self-purification, seek to instil in the Self the craving to make claims of superiority and the pursuit of a special status. In this phase of its intellectual evolution, apart from the love of God and sincerity, nothing else can help the Nafs. Indeed, the love of God and submission to the Messenger are beacons of guidance in this way-station. However, compliance to the messenger does not merely consist of outward actions and optional acts of worship. Rather it requires a complete and in-depth understanding of the Prophet's love, ethics and values.

In all of this, three ranks of the 'sweetness' of faith are clearly discernible. Firstly, when love is for the sake of Allah and enmity for the sake of Allah. Secondly, when love for the Messenger of Allah is stronger than all worldly ambitions and desire for wealth. Finally, when the Nafs feels absolute abhorrence to return to values of the animal instinct which are synonymous to unbelief or kufr. The Self at this stage of its 'training' will not, under any circumstances, turn back to its former ways. It is also at this stage that the minor

mistakes of the Nafs are overlooked, and it is given the news of forgiveness both in this world and the next. This is alluded to in the Quran:

O the Nafs (that is) content, return to your Lord pleased and pleasing. So Enter (amongst) my bondsmen and enter my Paradise. (89: 28-30)

Finally, no one can claim to be the ultimate specialist or an expert on the Nafs. However, broadly speaking, the Nafs is surrounded by the habits and tendencies acquired during three main phases. Thus it consists of genetic qualities; immediate parental upbringing; and personally acquired capacities. The latter two factors seem more prominent and are easily identified. However, the former, centuries old 'Fitrah' can be an invincible enemy. Thus, the mystic fights his ultimate battle against his own 'Fitrah'. In the face of overt and secret enemies, namely the Nafs and the Shaytaan, it is Allah alone who can influence this Fitrah, which He created. Ultimately, Allah's grace and love can conquer this level.

Self Realisation

We seek knowledge for many reasons. Some pursue it for utilitarian purposes – a tool to better their quality of life. Others acquire knowledge for the sake of knowledge and devote their lives to academic research, others still crave knowledge to understand themselves and attain self-realisation. These are the three main motives which define our relationship with knowledge. Whilst the aim of the first two groups is clear, the outcome of the third appears vague and abstract. Why do we want to pursue the goal of self-realisation and what drives us along this path? Is the search for abstract concepts synonymous with self-awareness? Are we drawn by the humbleness of the philosophers, when faced with the big questions of life, their habit of questioning and researching everything? In fact, every type of education, intellectual activity, self-reflection and a

focus beyond physical existence falls within the concept of self-realisation. Based on this it is clear that humanity has dedicated a vast portion of its intellectual capacity in exploring the nature of being human.

However, who has the authority to define the essence of humanity and of the perfect man? In relation to this has it been possible for anyone to set a benchmark for human perfection without any consideration to the spiritual and divine aspects of human beings? Is it not meaningless to talk of ethics at the same time as accepting that Man is compelled by time and space in his actions and does not have free will? Is the ultimate goal of self-realisation to avoid the pitfalls and mistakes which hinder the path of progress and civilisation? If not, then surely the desire to set yourself apart from ordinary people by adopting eccentric views and behaviour must be the purpose of self-realisation. The simple truth is that until and unless the goal of self-realisation is not clarified, its status as an intellectual concept will remain vague, obscure and lack wider acceptance. Psychopaths and all kinds of weird, wacky and self-delusional people without any inhibitions could claim the mantle of self-realisation if we cannot come to a shared understanding.

In contrast the paths of religion and mysticism regard self-realisation as an integral part of their intellectual tradition, leading to a clearly defined outcome. This is because having acquired the tools of intellectual enquiry, Man tolerates hardship and lives through rich and varied life experiences at the end of which he can boast of many achievements. But despite all this he still feels that his heart is totally empty of peace and tranquillity. Every religion and school of philosophy regards contentment of the heart as a separate value from physical satisfaction. The pleasures of life put together cannot still the restlessness of the heart and replace it with inner joy. It is clear that the disposition, causes and driving forces of this state are distinct from the paths of cold intellectualism and empty expressions of spirituality.

If self-realisation is the pinnacle of human development, then presumably it is a personal and subjective experience which has no connection with religion or wider society. It is for this reason that it is claimed that all inner states are incapable of being transferred from one person to another. These states and experiences are not such that they can be passed on to others through mind control and hypnosis. What benefit, then, can self-realisation provide for society? For the Western intellectuals it has produced a humanistic outlook and an approach which centres on human welfare. The self-proclaimed gurus of self-realisation have not been able to produce a better outcome than this. What pathways to tranquillity have these humanitarian preachers shown to society which entitles them to legislate for our communities and govern our lives? Even if it is accepted that self-realisation is a private matter, it can never usurp the right to dictate for any society whatsoever. There is no necessary correlation between human welfare and self-realisation; one does not depend on the other. It is possible to find many people who have not delved into the depths of philosophy or intricate self-analysis but are still engaged in acts of charity and humanity. However, they are strangers to their inner-selves. Pure self-realisation has never been an ideal that all of Mankind should regard as the ultimate goal of knowledge and life.

In reality, self-realisation is the product of an aspiration arising when intellectual endeavour leads a person to the realisation that wider society is incapable of supporting them in attaining a higher goal in life. What these individuals seek is the direct experience of reality. They have a strong feeling that the ultimate aim of reason and inner experience lies beyond physical matter, and whether they believe in God or not they are determined to find a solution to the fundamental question of human purpose.

Sometimes the desire for self-discovery arises from fear. The agony of such mental anguish has an impact on one's life and education, and ultimately prevents us from attaining our goals. The search to understand ourselves is borne out of the need for survival and normality. Self-realisation is the ability to tame the forces of your reptilian instincts by using reason and consciousness. It is about gaining control over the

destructive and anarchic forces within you so that they do not block you from your quest to attain higher consciousness. The emotional tremors which shake the core of our being at birth begin the succession of emotions which continue until we die. We are engaged in a constant struggle to protect ourselves from these painful feelings which induce uncertainty. To help us we fall back on the survival instinct and cultural norms.

Whether this has any impact on weakening our reptilian instincts I am not sure. However, most people manage to create a fragile equilibrium of the reptilian forces and achieve some degree of mental stability. This uneasy balance is seen as normal human behaviour and part of our biological make-up. As a result, most people regard psychotic and extreme behaviour as an independent but integral part of the 'normal' psychological balance and try to get on with their lives. The inevitable consequence of all this is that they unwittingly strengthen the reptilian forces of the Nafs. However, there are a few people who are not content with living in this state because they realise that this is not the real balance of power. They struggle continuously to arrive at the real state of balance which has been defined by God. The difference between the balance of power which God has set up for Man and the reptilian balance of power is like that of the Earth and sky. The entire aim of the reptilian scale is centred on human efficiency and productivity. It is a visible scale which does not allow an individual to break free from the psychotic and depressive tendencies of wider society, ensuring that there is no hindrance in the dominating routines of life. Psychological balance is defined as conformity to the lifestyles and views of society. Everybody acts the same, thinks the same and wants the same things.

In contrast the definition of 'balance' given by God is built on the harmonisation of the inner and outer dimensions of humanity, providing liberation from living lives of chaos and crisis. It offers a lifestyle which at first may seem a little strange to many people. God's definition of the 'balanced' human is simple: tranquillity of the heart and freedom from fear and worry. This phrase seems easy enough to understand, but attaining to its true meaning is not possible without self-realisation. However, there has to be an

ultimate goal behind self-realisation and the attainment of 'balance'. These are just the stepping-stones that lead to something greater. But what is this ideal? It is probably difficult for Western and secular intellectuals to accept that there is an Absolute Reality greater than Man. It may be the case that the desire to seek refinement of the body and soul for the sake of God is purely an assumption and figment of the imagination, but it is undeniable that the process of self-realisation cannot start without first sorting out what your priorities are in life.

One could probably ask the question whether to believe in God or not. Yet to question the purpose behind self-realisation is seen as an utter waste of time. The first step towards self-awareness is to develop certainty of knowledge. When the human mind attains to unshakeable certainty of its ultimate purpose it is faced with two choices. It can become entrenched in vainglory and arrogance even in the presence of the ultimate reality in the manner of Satan, which leads it to use deception and spurious arguments to reject the commands of God; or it can choose to develop awe, reverence and love for its real master and build its life around devotion and service to Him. This can only happen if we incline towards the reformation of the reptilian Self and seek the proximity of God. This stream of thought is known as Tasawwuf (Mysticism). It is an outcome of this way of thinking that Man develops an intense desire to perfect the thoughts and behaviours which divert him from the love of God. His entire being is driven by this desire for the divine. He develops a state of awareness which enables him to self-evaluate his thoughts, actions and feelings in relation to the divine balance.

The task of rooting out the dark forces that lurk within us is not easy, since the reptilian Self attempts to thrust us back again and again to its deep-rooted habits. Repentance contains the idea of regret and remorse, but according to Imaam Ja'far Sadiq (d. 765 CE) 'repentance is easy, abandoning sinful acts is much harder.' The realisation that you do not have the right 'balance' is the primary motive leading to the path of self-realisation. A state of mind comes into being which is always self-reflective and careful to avoid any thought, action or behaviour which could distance it from God. This is the alchemy of

self-realisation. Purifying the body and training the mind are both essential parts of this struggle. Without the appropriate consciousness of mind, the body regards every physically demanding action as a hardship. In the same way spiritual contemplation and retreats alone can become part of the deceptions of the Nafs as it can take you away from action.

The Quran is the only book in the world which reflects ultimate knowledge and reality. The responsibility of carrying this perfect knowledge was given not to an unstable person, but to the human being who manifested the most perfect personality. It was therefore, revealed to Muhammad the Messenger of God. Through this, God has indicated a fundamental principle relating to knowledge. He who has the greatest knowledge will also be the one who is the most perfectly balanced. Knowledge in this context does not mean the various branches and departments of learning. The fact that some people may become distinguished in a particular specialism or field does not confer on them any real greatness, unless they are able to identify the purpose of self-realisation in accordance with the ultimate priority of knowledge. Human perfection and balance can only occur when a person endeavours to discover who they are within the broader context of God's knowledge. This must be coupled with efforts to curb the excesses of the reptilian ego so that this does not act as a barrier between you and the recognition of God at any moment in time. Knowledge is consciousness of God (Taqwa), which in turn is the perfectly balanced character. It is possible that you may attain temporary balance of character, but unless you constantly remain watchful over the Nafs, there is no guarantee that it may not revive its negative character traits and plunge you back into the abyss of chaos and catastrophe.

Self-realisation can easily become self-deception if you yourself are its only yardstick. The measure of self-realisation can never be based on subjective standards. Just as the human race has produced many specialists in the various branches of science, it has also produced experts in the field of self-realisation. The objective manner in which the great prophets have explored and clarified all aspects of this area cannot be ignored. Their findings have

been verified by the friends of God (Saints) whose lives are a testament to the research of the Prophets. Ignorance led to the separation of Tasawwuf from ordinary life. The fact is that not all human beings are of the same skill and calibre in every field of learning. It is only a few who succeed in mastering a particular area and are regarded as an authority in that field. Why is it that Tasawwuf was regarded as an exception to this?

The number of prophets and saints produced by human societies is far greater than the number of philosophers and scientists to whom human intellectual development is attributed. The difference however, is that the latter were never the source of compassion and generosity for society in the way that a prophet or saint became. It is because of these experts of the Self and due to God that society has arrived at this point in its civilisation. The deceit of the reptilian ego has in every age held the majority of men captive to extremism, anarchy and destruction, and in every period the masters of self-understanding have ensured the survival of humanity through moderation. The day of judgement will occur only when the realisers of God are no more. It is possible that many experts of different fields may exist for a long time, but none of them are essential for the continuation of the human species.

Scientists have given Mankind a small number of materialistic benefits, but at the same time they have created the technology which could destroy the entire human race. They do not possess balance and moderation. The means of survival and destruction are poles apart. Ten thousand years of human history can be wiped out in a matter of ten minutes. Even the philosophers have not advanced to a level which would entitle them to lead society. In reality, many of them cannot satisfy the conditions of balance. In relation to self-realisation it is impossible to find a single piece of work written on this subject by a philosopher or scientist. Who amongst them can teach us how to attain 'balance' in our thoughts and actions? Is there anyone who can lead us to the station of peace and tranquillity?

The prevalence of anxiety, agitation and restlessness indicates that science cannot find a solution to the emptiness of the human heart. The absence of experts on self-realisation is acutely being felt. It seems that humanity is crying out for the masters of self-awareness to come and ease their pain. The tragedy is that knowledge of the self has become the victim of many false and self-proclaimed 'masters' who have exploited ordinary people and sucked them dry like some wild bulls on the rampage. Every street, town and city is littered with mounds of pseudo-Sufis who are completely ignorant of the knowledge of self-realisation and can just about pronounce its name. These quacks fear neither God nor His creatures. A new type of colonisation based on deceit and deception is under construction. Unfortunately this time it is religion that is under attack and especially Islam, and it does not matter whether it is Bush, Blair or the local fabricator of magical amulets. In fact the danger is greater when this wave of colonisation is led by the Mosque Mullah, hereditary Shaikh, or the well-groomed scholar of the Madrasah.

How did Prehistoric Man discover God?

Archaeological experts and scholars of antiquity have devoted an immense amount of time to understand the lifestyles, economic activities and social systems of ancient civilisations. After tireless and painstaking effort they have pieced together the evolution of early human societies and identified their levels of intellectual development. But they have deliberately ignored a fundamental dimension of this study. Under the pretext of objective research, investigation and reliance on facts they allow no possibility of religion, let alone the suggestion of any divine inspiration, to be considered as a potential factor in their explanations. Detailed descriptions of priests and temples in these ancient societies are given, but there is a refusal to acknowledge the possibility of any external source of guidance on earth directed by a creative force.

Instead these experts insist that in prehistoric societies the innate fear and terror felt by early human beings from natural threats and disasters led to the invention of religion. This was a direct consequence of their limited intelligence and understanding. However, the researchers of antiquity rarely display the courage to go beyond the period of polytheism. It is a general principle that the concept of 'divine unity' can be glimpsed in every pagan belief system. Idol worship in most societies came after a period of devotion to a single, universal deity. Looking at the Greek gods, we notice that before the families of Zeus and Hera and in the backdrop of all the gods of Mount Olympus, there was the great God Cronus who had the ability to swallow up all others. According to Greek mythology Cronus was later dethroned by Zeus. The explanation behind the spread of idolatry amongst the ancients is that as long as the belief in One God remained, the worship of idols and the creation of images and statues was strictly prohibited. Prophets and priests of that period followed supra-human, metaphysical guidance, worshipping one universal deity and shunning polytheism.

The concept of divine unity can also be found in the mythology and belief system of Hinduism. This states that the Aryans started with the One God Indira, the God of paradise, thunder and lightning. In the cultural period that followed, they linked the One God in the trinity of Mithra and Verona. In another conception of the trinity, the God of the Brahmans is the one and Absolute God. According to the description of Manu he is alone and has no partners. However, it is the attributes of this One God that are manifested in the forms of gods such as Vishnu and Shiva. It is a fact that all idol-worshipping mythologies end with the sovereignty of One God. Perhaps, the abstract and inaccessible concept of One God, led shortsighted and unprincipled priests, driven by greed and wealth, to create means of intercession so that they could have a share of the Absolute Sovereignty of God.

The flood of Noah is mentioned in almost every ancient mythology. The Bible, Torah and the Quran, all confirm that this was a universal flood that did not spare any unbeliever or polytheist. The passengers of Noah's Ark were the ones who witnessed this

major event and passed it on. It is certain that this mighty flood was not confined to the region of Mesopotamia, nor that it was the consequence of the transgression of the inhabitants of the Euphrates and Tigris. The fact is that as a result of this flood the children of Noah spread all over the world; the boundaries of human civilisation reached all the places where the human race is found today. If this had been an ordinary and localised flood its reports would not be found in all world mythologies which roughly originate around the same period after the flood and in similar societies.

It is possible to acknowledge that due to the intermingling of societies, the legend of the great flood entered the mythology of many cultures. However, this would have had to happen at a much later stage of mass human migration. This theory cannot explain how Manu, the founder of the human race in Hindu mythology, talks about the flood; how the Sumerian epic of Gilgamesh mentions it in detail; how Scandinavian mythology is full of the stories of the flood. The reality is that the source of the stories of the great flood can only come from the survivors of the Ark, and this also explains how the story is found in myths and legends of cultures separated by time and space.

If this had been a localised flood, there would not have been any need to gather all the different animals, especially animals that are harmful to humans and have never been 'befriended' by Man. Looking after scorpions and snakes on a ship is not the most sensible thing to do. It is clear that this flood was a universal flood and God wanted to save the different types of species through His prophet - irrespective of whether these species were friends or enemies of Mankind.

Centuries later the report of this event reached other societies; but what need was there for these cultures, who had not experienced the flood themselves, to make this story part of their religious traditions in a very diligent manner? There seems to be only one explanation. To the survivors, this flood was a historical event of such magnitude that, like a terrifying threat, it seeped into the unconsciousness of Mankind. The terror it produced in their minds was so intense that even future generations could not forget it.

Perhaps, God-fearing elders narrated the story of the flood to warn and caution the heedless of future generations so that the intellect could witness the consequences of misguidance.

There were two major trends after the great flood. First, the dispersal of the human species across the globe was accelerated. Crossing the boundaries of a specific region the descendants of Noah spread to every corner of the Earth - even building homes in regions of boundless ice and snow like the Eskimos (Inuit). Second, the worship of One God became the custom of every human society for a considerable period of time. Modern research into pre-history is still confined to the age of polytheism. Were we to advance beyond the period of statues and idols, we would discover the reality that monotheism came before polytheism. Existing civilised societies have their origin in the second period of the Neolithic or Stone Age. As yet there is little anthropological evidence of polytheism and idol worship in these early societies.

Another fact that cannot be ignored is that all early societies were religious communities, structured around a priestly class. At a time when the human race was preoccupied with seeking the means of survival, religious consciousness seems to be an exceptional phenomenon. Its presence cannot be explained by the usual workings of the mind. Early Man was not driven by the fear of death. Experience shows that when a single idea dominates every aspect of a person's life, and when life and death are witnessed on a regular basis, the mind does not fear death; instead it is eager to forget its existence and not be reminded of it. It is impossible to imagine that the concept of an after-life, fear of a Creator, and philosophical and metaphysical ideas are the product of an uncivilised and underdeveloped human mind. Yet, the highly advanced and developed human mind of the modern age regards this life as the only and final stage of existence, and the thinkers of our time have reached the conclusion that religion and the notion of an after life are figments of the imagination. This shows that left to its own devices, the human mind cannot develop such metaphysical notions. How then did the primitive minds of early cultures arrive at such conclusions? A plausible explanation is that the cultures of that

time may have received some external supra-human guidance. Their intellectual growth and development was influenced by a power greater than Man. In this way, the wild and untamed groups of humans were given the means to culture their minds.

Prehistoric Man does appear to be different from other animals, but not to the degree that one of our ancestors was able to develop the intelligence to undertake a Ph.D. in rocket engineering. Educational advances were slow and rudimentary, requiring many centuries, not years to make small steps of progress. The human mind was like that of a child whose hand has to be held in order to teach them anything, or like that of an undisciplined student who has to be taught through understanding, coaxing and gentle threats. But who was there to teach the wild and undisciplined human being of prehistoric times? There is only one answer to this question: God.